

IDYLLS OF A  
DUTCH VILLAGE



S. ULFERS

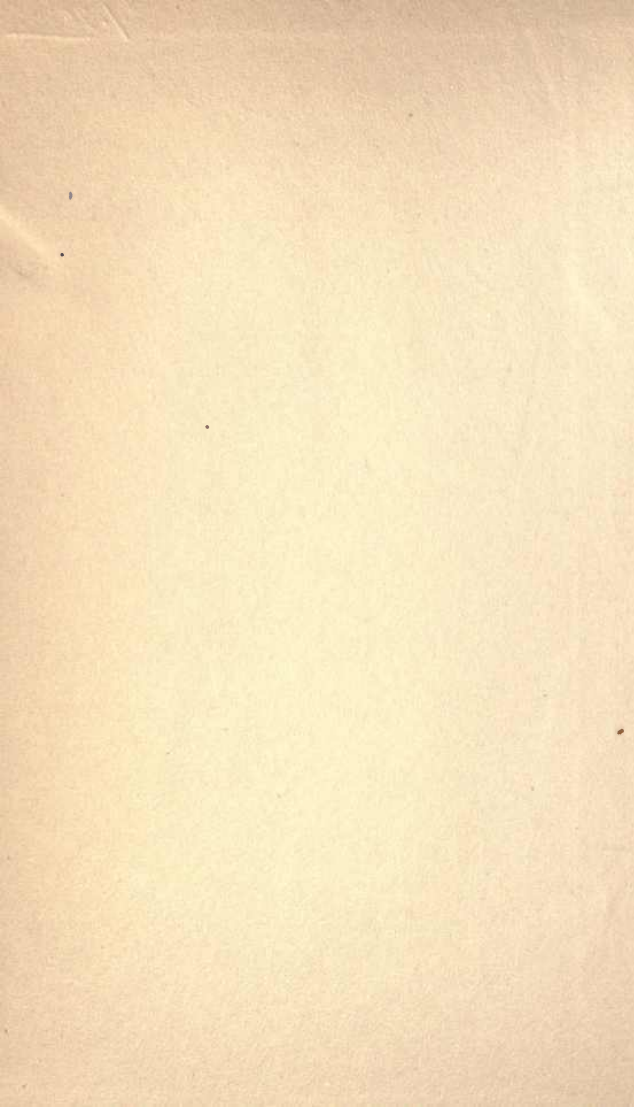


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IDYLLS OF A DUTCH VILLAGE  
(EASTLOORN)

BY

**S. ULFERS**

TRANSLATED BY

**B. WILLIAMSON-NAPIER**

NEW YORK

**E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY**

**681 FIFTH AVENUE**

DETAILS OF A DUTCH VILLAGE

(EASTLONK)

BY

S. ULTERS

TRANSLATED BY

B. WILLIAMSON-WATKIN

NEW YORK

E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY

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101 FIFTH AVENUE

## P R E F A C E

*I have observed the beauty of a farmer's life among his meadows and cornfields, under the canopy of clouds.*

*I have also observed the beauty of a minister's work among these people.*

*And it is about these things that I wish to tell you.*

*If there be a moral in the story, so much the better!*







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## WIEGEN, THE DREAMER

On a knoll, amongst the tall heather which covered the undulating moor around him, lay Wiegen, the big shepherd boy, watching his sheep in the valley beneath.

"Come here, Sipi!" he shouted to his dog, who away in the distance was jumping up against one of the sheep and had bitten a tuft of wool from its neck.

But the dog refused to come at once. He was young and was still trying to find out who was to lay down the law, his master or he.

"I shall teach you to obey me!" Wiegen said to himself. "Why would you not come when I called you?"

And at the same time he stuck his long shepherd's staff with a small iron goad at the point into the earth, and aimed the lump of sandy soil which he dug up, so directly and with such painful force at the dog's ribs, that he left the

sheep with a yelp and crept up to his master with drooping ears. He lay down submissively, waiting for what might come, all the while casting furtive side glances at the boy.

"Tell me now, what Blackie did to you?" said the shepherd to his dog; "why do you not like him? Do you want him to lose all his wool and have a shorn neck? I shall break your legs, old boy, if you do it again. Do you think I want Schepers to tell me that I allow you to eat up his sheep?"

But Sipie only gazed and gazed up at his master, at his eyes and his hands. If those hands had wished to hurt him, he would have avoided them by a side-leap, for he was as quick as lightning. But the humble hypocrite lay there quietly as if ready to receive the blows in a penitent spirit; it was not necessary to jump up before those hands moved; he was now reaping the benefit of the humble.

Wiegen stretched himself at full length on the hill, and forgetting about all earthly things, his large and dreamy eyes roamed over the country around him, and over the blue sky and the clouds as they came and went.

On the knoll where he lay stood two or three birches. The old trunks towered upwards, thick and crooked, glistening white with black

patches. The branches were white and glistening up to the top, where they changed into brown and broke into a hundred thin, fine, hanging stems, which gave the trees the appearance of weeping trees. But this was not so at all. A cheerful tone prevailed in trunks and foliage, delicate green foliage, which ever rustled and never hung still, talking, whispering about a thousand things which happen on the moor, and of which only the birches can know.

"Oh! go on talking and whispering, for I know all about it," Wiegen thought. "Did you imagine I did not know that quite early this morning the rabbits sat here, and that they played about until the two big bucks bit each other, while the does sat by the side? And that the whole troop scuttled off head over heels to their holes, because the hawk shot down from a height. And what did the hawk tell you that I do not know? I know it all, and that he sat on the branch looking across the hills at the marsh, and that you dared not say a word then."

And Wiegen, lying at full length, gazed up at the little twigs, which laughed and nodded at him.

"But I know something that you do not



know," he continued pensively; "you can look across the moor, because you are so tall and high, but you cannot move from your places; you must always and always remain here; you will never get any further! You cannot get to the ducks in the morning, when they swim and dive and skim the surface of the water. I was there early this morning; they were sitting on the bank, and they stuck their beaks in between their feathers, and under their wings. They wanted to make them oily and clean. They took out the dead feathers, they did not want them, for they let them fall on the ground; the whole bank is still full of them. And you did not see what I did, you sleepy-heads! They did not know I was coming, for I can steal along quietly on my bare feet against the wind. And I had told Sipie to keep quiet, and I hit one with a stone, just on its head. Look! here it is, dead; do you want to see it?"

And he raised himself up from his prostrate position and took the duck, a large and shining one, from the bag beside him.

"Do you see it up there?" he said.

"No, Sipie, leave it alone, go away!" For the dog already had the feathers between his teeth.

"Look, it has a red beak with a green point,



and the wings are blue and white. It is a drake. And do you feel the thickness of those greyish brown feathers on its breast? Wine shall have him when she comes."

And at the same time he put the bird back into the bag. It might be that the village policeman was sneaking about in the neighbourhood.

But his conversation with the birches was finished for the time being. For, sitting up straight, he fixed his eyes on the far horizon over the low range of hills; and he gazed behind him in the other direction. One could never tell; that policeman had such a stealthy way of creeping about.

But it was Wine, there in the distance; he could see her skirt blowing about. Now she was climbing down the hill; a moment after she was visible on the next, nearer now and so it went on; lost in the valley, and then in sight on the hill top; but always coming nearer and nearer.

"Here, Sipiel!" Wiegen shouted.

For the dog, as well as his master, had discerned the girl's figure long ago. He knew she was bringing dinner; the dog never mistook the time of day.

And Wiegen shouted in vain, and with his shepherd's staff he threw a lump of earth, which did not touch him. The dog had a master and a mistress; he belonged to the one as much as to the other; the one coming now had a right over him too. And the boy saw how in the distance the dog jumped up against her, and licked her hands, and bounded on in front of her towards him.

"He is still too young," Wiegen grumbled; "within a few months, I shall have given him a better training than any other shepherd in the country could do."

"Here is your dinner," said Wine, without greeting him, for this was not customary. "Schepers told them to give you some bacon."

And as the youth untied the cloth, he saw a plate with potatoes and bread as well, which he started dividing with his dog.

The girl stood leaning against the trunk of a birch tree; her strong legs did not require any rest.

"Have you nothing to say to me?" she enquired.

The boy was busy eating as if she were not standing there, he had not even glanced at her. Had he looked at her, he would have

seen her large eyes gazing pensively at him, the silent one.

"Why should I talk? You do not care about the things I tell you. Does it interest you, if I tell you about the hawk, and if I tell you about the rabbits, and if I tell you about the birches? You did not care either when I told you about the clouds. Did I not see it quite distinctly? What do you want me to say to you then?"

But the girl did not say what she would have liked him to talk about. Her eyes were eloquent enough, if her lips were not. "That boy is blind and deaf," she thought; "a dreamer!" And she pouted. But aloud she said:

"Surely, you know that we girls do not care about a hawk, or about your rabbits. Those are things for boys, Wiegen!"

He looked up with some surprise and with a placid look in his eyes; more placid than Wine had ever seen in the eyes of any other boy in the village. He did not seem capable of understanding in what way a girl's wishes differ from those of a boy. In order to show him that, her lips would have had to be pouted still more. Now, however, he only saw a haughty and cold little face, haughty with

disappointment; and yet that proud look soon passed away.

"I have thought of something, Wiegen," she said. "You must have your hair cut. It is far too long; the other boys in the village tease you about it."

And indeed, the long, black locks which fell about his brown face and almost reached his shoulders made him look like a gipsy.

"And then there is another tear in your coat; how did that happen? When you come home with the sheep this evening, you must bring it to me and I will mend it, for your mother cannot do it any longer; her eyes cannot see the thread."

And Wiegen had a vague notion what the things were that girls thought about and liked to talk of. Did Wine like to hear about those things?

"And then, I have thought of something else," the girl went on talking. "You are eighteen years old now, and it is high time that you should stop looking after sheep. Only little boys do that sort of work, and you are far too big for that. All boys who have looked after sheep find other work to earn their living. And you cannot do anything else! Can you dig the ground? Can you drive a cart

with horses? Can you reap clover and rye with a scythe? You cannot do those things, Wiegen! All boys marry some day, and then they must be able to do all the farm-work; but a shepherd cannot get married. Looking after sheep is only fit for little boys!"

And Wiegen once more had a vague notion what the things were that the village girls thought about, and liked to talk of. Was it those things that Wine wished to hear of?

He sat there as one who has been allowed to peep into another world, and gazed on that strong figure against the tree with those covetous eyes and those wonderful lips which were yet bewitching. And it was as a seeker into that new world, that with innocent curiosity he enquired:

"Do all girls talk about marrying, as you do, Wine? And how old are you, when you start talking about it? You are sixteen, are you not?"

A deep red coloured the big girl's face, but it was not caused by shame, for her eyes looked angry as she turned to the boy, who did not even know that his prosaic ideas of things might be irritating to another person.

So she said "I must go," and wanted to take the plate and the cloth.



"But I want to talk to you, Wine," the boy said. "Listen, I have seen something again. As you stand there you can see the marsh, can you not? that wide stretch of water between the hills?"

And saying this, he jumped up, and standing next to her, almost behind her, he placed one hand on her shoulder and with the other he indicated the expanse of the pool from one end to the other.

She liked to feel Wiegen's hand on her shoulder, and she thought he might tell her anything he liked if he would only do that. What it was about, mattered less.

"There, on the water, I saw a boat last night, and in the boat stood Peter, Peter the Apostle. He was hauling in a net, with great difficulty. For the fish which he had caught were people, men and women, dressed in many coloured clothes. And he took them out of the net and placed them in the boat, until the boat was quite full. 'I am not worthy, Lord, to be a fisher of men,' he cried, 'but if it be Thy will, I shall do as Thou sayest, Lord!' And he steered the boat towards the shore, to where the pines are. 'Come out of it, all of you,' Peter said, and the men and women standing on the bank awaited his



orders. 'You must live here under the trees, without houses and in tents; you shall be shepherds and live with the flocks. This is the new life. For all cities shall pass away, and all towers and churches shall be destroyed, and you are the new kingdom, which shall be built.' And I saw the sun shining on the coloured clothes of the new people, with a red light, because the sun was setting. But after sunset, when the red light no longer shone on the pines, the bright colours also disappeared from the clothes and they all looked grey, and afterwards even the figures vanished, and, when I looked again, there was nothing more to be seen. 'Peter,' I cried, 'Peter!' and I ran to the pool, but the boat was not there either; everything had gone."

Wiegen might have said anything he liked if only he had left his arm on the girl's shoulder. But now he had taken away his arm, and he stood there, almost forgetting the very presence of Wine. Not a glance for her, not a word for her. His large eyes, glowing with enthusiasm, gazed at the distant water; he apparently cared more about a white creature of the mist, which he had seen in his imagination, than about the girl of flesh and blood who stood beside him. And she

turned away passionately, as if she meant to go.

"Silly nonsense, Wiegen, it was the evening mist hanging over the water in the setting sun."

"Wine, you do not understand." He drew himself up to his full length and pointed with his shepherd's staff at the far horizon. "Do you not feel it? I have felt it such a long time. A new time is coming, the old time is passing away. The old time is corrupt, and mankind is corrupt, and the Church is old and corrupt. Everything must become new. And I must go and preach it unto all nations. There shall be no more cities, and no more houses and no more churches. Vast flocks and herds shall be in the fields; and no one shall call anything his own. New people shall dwell on the earth, beautiful men and women, and they shall have all things in common. And God's evening glow shall illumine all the new world."

"And will those men and women marry each other?" Wine enquired.

"I did not hear that yesterday. But I have read — it is written — 'There shall be no marriage, for all people shall be as God's angels in Heaven'" And he was on the point

of reaching for his bag under the birch tree to fetch out his Bible.

But the girl had never before been so angry with the dreamer as she was now. He did not see it, however; he was looking elsewhere. But had he looked, he would have seen a beautiful girl, with a face on which pride and scorn fought with desperate love, a girl who would have loved to trample on that book of Revelation, in which this dreamer found his words and visions daily. She could have torn the book out of his hand, thrown it on to the ground in the mud, and kicked it until it was in pieces.

But it was not necessary. For instead of a Bible a duck was taken out of the bag. The boy's thoughts had quite suddenly taken another turn.

"Look," he said. "I almost forgot this. Here is the duck which I caught for you. But don't let the policeman see." And, as if the subject had not been changed so abruptly, he related to her the history of the duck, which he had killed with a stone.

A moment later the girl had really departed. She walked away with the bird under her apron, the cloth and the plate in her hand. Sijpe accompanied her to the farthest hill.

She had tears in her eyes, the wild tears of one who loved, and who despaired of seeing a new life coming to the loved one, a new life in the way she understood it.

Wiegen was three different beings; one was the boy, who talked with the flowers and the birds; the second was the dreamer, who saw visions, where no one else saw them; and the third was the sleeping one, whom Wine could not awaken, although she brought him his dinner day after day.

And it was the sleeping one, when awakened, whom she would have loved most.

After Wine had left, Wiegen had slept for an hour or more. He had lain under the birches, stretched at full length with his face buried in the heath, his hand under his head. Why should a shepherd not sleep in the middle of the day, when a faithful dog watches the sheep, a dog who never sleeps?

But he was awake now, and, before he jumped to his feet, a plan had ripened in his head. He whistled for the dog who was keeping watch on a hill, the outline of his pointed head and pricked up ears clearly visible against the sky.

"Good dog, well done!" He stroked the

animal, who understood everything, and for whose education caresses were better than blows. "I am going for a swim, Sipie, are you coming with me?"

The delighted dog bounded on in front of him towards the marsh; he had come to the water while his master was still lingering on the highest hill and looking round.

"I can safely do it," Wiegen said; "the sheep are lying quite peacefully, and Schepers will not come, I should think. There is no one on the moor, so far as I can see."

And, going down the hill, it was not long before he also stood on the bank beside the water. Sipie's mouth was full of ducks' feathers, and he was playing a game with them. He let them go, and when the wind carried them along, he jumped after them faster than the wind. He would have preferred the ducks themselves, but to him it was almost as if he had them in the feathers.

A coat, a shirt, and a pair of trousers, that was all Wiegen had to throw on the ground. For a moment he stood there, his naked, rosy flesh gleaming in the white sunlight against the blue water; then he plunged in head first, diving down amidst the splashing water, and rising to the surface far away



in the middle of the pool. He dived and swam with such speed that he shot straight up, the upper part of his body appearing above the water. A laughing young rural god, whose laugh was veiled by dripping water. A moment later he disappeared again into the deep water, his head first, then his body, then his legs.

The dog looked about for his master in surprise, and swam about the spot where he had disappeared, seeking for him.

"Here, Sipie!" The boy's voice came to him from some distance, where Wiegen had come up again, holding a stone, which he had dived for, in his hand. "Find it!"

And the dog came rushing along, but did not dive for the stone.

"Silly dog, will you never learn to dive?" And to punish him, he threw handfuls of water against his head. But the dog revenged himself, for he swam up to his master and placing his paws on the soft flesh, he made long scratches with his sharp nails.

Then, quite suddenly, Wiegen disappeared again with a few strong overarm strokes, beating the water into a foam with his feet, so that any one standing by the side could not have seen him for the clear splashing of water, sparkling as crystal.



Then he floated with stiff feet and arms stretched out, his eyes closed, a white water-lily on the blue surface.

Afterwards he swam races with his dog, so that the wavelets splashed up against the bank, and the sound of his laughing and shouting echoed against the hills.

Then he sat on the bank in the sun, his arms clasped round his knees, Sipie beside him, licking himself dry, as if he were not going to jump in again.

"It must have been nice the way John baptized people," the boy thought, as he felt the pleasant heat of the sun on his skin, and stretched himself on the warm, moist moss. "What was it I read yesterday?.... John baptized at the river Jordan, near Bethabara, because there were many waters there?... Yes, that was what I read. It must have been much nicer than being baptized by our minister in church. I should not mind being baptized every day by John... But — what was it the people had to promise if they were baptized by him?... Oh, I remember; the minister told us. Well, I should have been quite willing to promise that; to help him to found the new kingdom, there in the desert, far away from the cities. Of course Jesus

is the most beautiful figure in the Bible. But I like John best! I should like to have been John myself!"

The idea roused him.

He jumped up with a wild leap. He sought for the big coloured handkerchief in his coat, which was lying on the ground, and in a moment he had tied it as a girdle about his loins, in between his legs. He stood there, his black locks hanging on his neck, with the long shepherd's staff in his hand, and, gazing with large, almost fanatic eyes to the distance, he exclaimed:

"I am John! listen to the word of the Lord, all you children of men! You children of men, who live in the East, and in the West, and all of you who live in the South!"

His voice rang over the wide water and resounded in the pine trees on the other side. He fixed his gaze on those woods, those thousand trunks on the opposite side of the lake, as if they were the people for whom his words were meant.

"The last days of the world are near! The new heaven and the new earth shall come. Everything shall be consumed by fire, the houses shall be burned, the church and the school shall be burned. Mother and Wine,

your houses shall also be burned. Come to me in the desert! Here I shall found my new community. We shall live in purity and in safety. Bread shall be our food and the water from the marsh shall be our drink. No one shall have money. All the gold and all the silver shall be buried under the three birches, as were the idols of Jacob's house under the oaks of Shechem. We shall cast off our beautiful clothes; we shall all have a girdle about our loins and nakedness shall be our clothing. Come to me, all you people of Eastloorn! For the flames shall not reach here! This shall be the inheritance of the Lord! I, John, have spoken it!"

The fanatic's speech would have commenced again, and he would have worked out his thoughts still further, if Sipie had not bounded up the hill, barking.

John the Baptist looked in that direction in great astonishment.

And a moment after he saw, appearing above the summit of the hill, the minister's grey head. He was red and panting with the effort of climbing. The old minister of Eastloorn, standing erect on the hill-top, looked taller than he was, against the sky.

"What does this mean, Wiegen?" he exclaimed. "Come here and tell me what pranks you are at now!"

The big boy obeyed, and climbed up, without remembering that he should put on clothes. The old man looked at the beautiful youth with secret pleasure; he could not help being pleased.

He had sat down, tired, and Wiegen lay down at his feet.

"Why were you shouting so, Wiegen? I heard you at the three birches where I thought I should find you. And what were you saying about John the Baptist? It is a good thing there were no other people near, or they might have thought you were not quite sane, Wiegen!"

"Did you wish to speak to me, Sir, that you looked for me at the three birches?"

"Certainly, my boy, I was over there in Ake's hut, seeing her, and then I thought I should like to speak to you, for I never find you at home when I go to your mother's, and I have something to say to you too."

Wiegen could think nothing but good of this man, who never forgot one of his parishioners, and who came so far to look for him, the shepherd lad, a boy of very little impor-

tance after all. But, according to the tradition of the people in Eastloorn, he did not tell the man that he thought well of him. These people were not accustomed to say straight out anything having the slightest appearance of praise. And the old minister had long since given up trying to find any strength for his work in encouraging words or praise from the members of his church. He had often thought, with a laugh on his old face, of his colleagues in the cities, and of what they would do without the smiles and handshakes and kind words which they expected from their flock, and which gave them the power to continue their difficult work.

"Tell me, my boy, what did you mean by shouting and screaming so about John the Baptist?"

"I was John the Baptist, sir! This was the desert; and I had a girdle about my loins. And those thousand trunks there were a thousand people, to whom I was proclaiming the word of the Lord!"

It did not occur to the boy that he was doing anything strange, or saying anything strange. Neither did the old man fail to notice that this might quite well have been the figure of the great Baptist, when as a young man



he started his work as a prophet in Israel, eating locusts and wild honey in the desert.

"What were you going to preach unto the people, Wiegen?"

"I feel that a different time is coming, sir. It is not well in the country, or with the Church. If the nations are not converted, God's judgment will come also over our people in Eastloorn!"

The minister felt a little uneasy about what would come from the mouth of the dreamer, as some one might who sees an estimate made of all the work, which he has done for forty years, according to a certain method and the best of his ability, in a community which he has ministered to with all diligence.

"The Church is not at all like the kingdom of God on earth, of which I have read in the Bible," the boy said. "Jesus has founded a kingdom of heaven, and the people have made a Church of it. You must know that too, sir!"

The old man looked up, surprised. Who had taught the boy that difference? He was curious to know what the lad would make of it. And he encouraged him to pursue the subject by asking: "What is wrong with it then, Wiegen?"

"When you have done your work with your pupils, sir, then you have made them members of a church; but I should like them to be members of the kingdom of heaven, and afterwards baptize them, here in the marsh. But the people prefer the Church; it is easier in every way, do you see? When you become a member of the Church, well, then you go to church, and you believe the doctrine of your Church, and you do your best to make that Church greater, and you strive after the glory of the Church. But the world does not gain by it. The people remain the same. They all seek after riches. Just think of this parish! In what way does the Church alter a man?"

"What should you like then, my boy?"

"Away with the ministers, and away with the elders, and away with that stone building, and away with all outward show!"

The boy jumped up and stood straight in front of his minister, in his left hand his staff, and his right hand stretched out.

"I wish for the kingdom of heaven upon earth! If the people would only do what Jesus said, it would be here now! They would begin to love each other with a great love. They would not wish to be anything special, the one above the other. They would not wish

to be rich farmers or to be in the town council; they would sell all they possessed and give to the poor, so that all would be equally rich. They would cast off their beautiful clothes and do away with all nice food. They would not be happy unless they saw others happy, they would not wish to become soldiers, and there would be no more generals or kings, either. They would all be shepherds and farmers, and there would be no more cities; they would all live in small villages. And each man would go about with his Bible in his pocket, enquiring each day what that book told him to do. But I know quite well why the people do not wish it, my kingdom of heaven! The Church is a thing which can be seen! And the kingdom is the new life, which cannot be seen!"

The old minister looked at the excited boy with kind eyes. There was nothing wrong with the theories which this young preacher of the desert was proclaiming. The old minister himself had often thought about such things in former years, when he had just commenced his career. But he had grown old and he had acquired a new insight.

"My boy, you do not know the history of the Church! Neither have you ever read any

of the world's history!" was the dry rejoinder to Wiegen's idealism.

"What is that, the history of the Church?" the boy enquired.

"It is all that has happened to the Church in former years. There have been many boys and men who thought as you do. Such notions always arise at certain times. One can calculate when such notions must arise again in the same way as one can count upon an eclipse of the moon with certainty. Look here, Wiegen, ever since Jesus was born, there have been people who wished to establish the kingdom of heaven upon earth in the way you mean. Some have wished to do it with the Bible in their hand, as you do. Others have wished to do it without that Bible, and they would like to do that at the present time. And some have tried to do it here, in the midst of civilized society; but others have tried it far away in the plains and the woods of warm countries, where they could go about naked, and where the juicy fruit hung on the branches. But none of those small kingdoms ever came to anything; they all passed away — sometimes in ten years, sometimes even in thirty days. And all those people who started such things did it because they

knew nothing about history. You do not know the history of mankind, either, Wiegen!"

"But why should it not be possible? Every failure brings us nearer to the last attempt; and that will finally be the successful one!"

"I should like to explain to you why it is not possible; but would you understand it, my boy? You may still be too young to understand. Look here; it is love which prevents it. When a man and a woman begin to love each other, to love each other truly, and then get married and have children, a small kingdom is formed, which learned people call a state in the state. According to your conception, that small kingdom is in the way of the great Kingdom of Heaven. The small interests are obstacles to the great interests. That man and woman, who love each other and who love their children, cannot help it, yet it is the case. The family is the greatest enemy of socialistic states, for that is what we sometimes call those small kingdoms; and Socialism is the greatest enemy of the family. And because the inclination of the human heart has always been towards the family, no small socialistic state could ever hold its own. They have all perished. The love for wife and children was always greater than the love for the kingdom.



The family interest is always of greater importance than the general interest. It is the family which will always destroy all so-called kingdoms of heaven. Only where the people cease wishing for a family can a socialistic state be possible. Do you understand now why I said that the love between man and woman must prevent such kingdoms of heaven ever existing upon earth?"

The old man hesitated about continuing to say that which the boy could not possibly understand. But he went on, if it were only to formulate his ideas for himself and to put them into words.

"Only where there is no love of man towards woman would it perhaps be possible to establish that kingdom; but love cannot be reasoned away. And also where one man loves more than one woman, and vice versa, it would be possible to establish such a kingdom, and that has been done. But you will understand that such a state cannot exist long. And so it has come about that we, dwellers upon earth, never enjoy the sight long of those so-called kingdoms of heaven. But what am I saying to you, a boy of eighteen! You do not understand it at all, do you? Your love has been no other than a love for the

trees and for the clouds, and for the birds; is it not so, Wiegen?"

The old minister had always been accustomed to say things to the members of his church, even if they did not understand him. He had never agreed with his colleagues, who always thought it necessary to preach and talk to their people in perfectly simple and childish language. "Do not think too little of their intellect," he always said. "Treat them according to a high standard; it is fallow soil, for the greater part, and if you sow in that soil you will find the harvest is greater than from another soil, which is cultivated every year!" And he was very seldom disappointed.

There was a confused expression on the boy's face, as of one who understands, and yet does not understand. "But I should like to know, sir, what the kingdom of heaven is, that you sometimes preach about on Sundays, and of which I have read in the Bible."

"You can understand that, Wiegen, and I will tell you. The kingdom of heaven, which John meant and of which Christ spoke, is righteousness! Where righteousness is, there is the kingdom. And that righteousness can be there with raiment of camel's hair and without that raiment. That righteousness can

be in the rich farmer and in the poor farmer. It can be in the town counsellor and in the shepherd. It can be in the soldier and in the elder. It can be in the church and out of the church. The kingdom is within you. Say in future: "I will preach righteousness!" and you will do more to hasten the coming of the kingdom of heaven, as Jesus wished it, than you would by reforming the world. Have you never read, Wiegen; 'the kingdom is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost?'"

"Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" the young man cried in despair, fixing his large eyes upon the sky and pointing towards the horizon with his shepherd's staff.

"That you put on your clothes again, Wiegen, and that you preach the kingdom of heaven in a coat and a pair of trousers, and in looking after your sheep!" the minister said with a laugh.

There was a blush of shame on the boy's face, and, as one who has suddenly come to his senses and whose eyes have been opened, he crept to the place where his clothes lay.

When he returned, the old man said, as he placed his hand on his shoulder: "Wiegen, you should leave the sheep to smaller boys

now; it is high time that you should become a labourer. You get lost here on the moor. You must go back to real life."

"That is what Wine said to me this morning too," the young man answered, and his wide eyes looked into those of his shepherd.

A moment after, the old man left him and walked towards the village, across the hills. And two questions were constantly in his mind. The first was: "Why did Wine say that to him? What did she want from that boy?" The old man had good eyes to look into the heart of a young girl.

And the second question was: "How is it that Socialism, Christian or unchristian Socialism, is by nature in the heart of man, even when he does not know it himself?" He was not long in finding the answer, but he was not so quick about finding the remedy to cure the people against their will.

As for Wiegen, — the minister did not consider him strange at all. He thought him one of the most natural boys in his parish.

It was on the village-square that the men gathered together in the evenings to talk over the affairs of the day.

The Square was in the centre of the

village. In former times, when Eastloorn was not yet a village, there was a country road from North to South, through dark woods, and on that spot stood the house where the weary traveller entered to rest either himself or his horse, for he had many miles to go before he reached the next house, far beyond the moor. And the road which led from the East to the West formed a cross-road there. In the course of years other houses were built round about it. But the original house was always considered the centre of the community. When it was thought necessary to build a church, the church was built there. Then there was not a doubt left that the centre of the village was near the old house at the cross-roads. And that idea still prevails to the present day.

There were some very high trees on the Square.

They were old oaks, and none of the old people in the community had seen them planted; Anen, the father of Brugt, the carrier, had always known them as thick as that; and the man was ninety years old. They were as high as the roof of the church; only the tower could be seen above the foliage.

And no one ever suggested that those trees should be felled. In other cases the farmers



were always very careful not to let a tree grow too old; they made money of it before the wood began to lose its value. But not the oaks on the Square, for the village would no longer have been the village if they had been cut down and new young trees planted instead. All the villages in the neighbourhood, and those far away in Overijssel, had a Square with oaks. Asmus, the German merchant, who visited all the villages, even those in Groningerland, had asserted that, if there were no Square, it was a sign that the villages were of a late period, and, therefore, had no distinguishing feature.

And there, under the oaks, stood the large pump of Eastloorn. The girls came to and fro with their pails to pump up the pure, deep water. The water came from a depth of a hundred feet, Baalder, the carpenter, always said; and he had been told by his father, who had changed the old well into a pump with a sucker and handle. The girls were never in a hurry with their pails, neither did they go away at once when the pails were full. They always helped each other, for it was hard work; and there was always much to talk about.

Quite near the pump, under the thickest tree, stood the seat, — stood two seats, in fact,

where the village boys generally sat with their feet on the bench, using the back to sit on. Then the pumping always lasted much longer, and the well seemed to be twice as deep as at other times.

It was Sunday evening, and, one by one, a man had come out of his house, and then another, and yet another; and another. They sat down on the seat, and stood beside it, these six or seven men, in the way they had been accustomed to all their days.

There was Wendel, the elder; and Schepers, another elder, whose house stood far away, beyond the inhabited part of the community; and Goesting, whose farm was on the moor among the pinewoods on the North side and on the outskirts of Southloorn; and Iken, who was a member of the Town Council; and Dreese, the grocer, for he had seen that the others were there, and he belonged to the party from of old. They all smoked short pipes and could talk without taking the pipe from their mouths.

"I wish you could help me," Schepers said, interrupting the conversation which had already been started; "you know Wiegen, my servant, who looks after the sheep?"

"The dreamer!" two of them shouted simultaneously.

"Yes, the dreamer! He is eighteen years old now and still a shepherd boy. I have been telling him for two years that it was time for him to stop, but he would not. Now, I had the minister with me yesterday, and he told me I must make him take to something else even if he does not wish it. And the minister is right, for it is high time that the boy was taught something about farming; otherwise it will be too late and he will grow up a ne'er-do-well. But, of course, I cannot let him go before I have found something else for him. Who is there in the community who could make use of the boy?"

It was the custom in Eastloorn that a man should think of his neighbour and that he should think well of him. When these old men met together on the Square in the evenings many things were discussed, which afterwards became deeds, and they were good deeds. There the servants were changed; there the orphans were boarded out; there the loans which a poor man might require for the year were agreed upon, and who should advance those loans; there the new members of the Town Council or the new

Church-wardens were chosen in time for the next election; there they considered what should be done in the moorland polder, and which roads had to be improved; so that, when afterwards Church-wardens and Town Councillors met, everything was ready and worked out; these important meetings only sanctioned what had been discussed and agreed upon by the men on the Square.

"It will be difficult," Goesting answered. "Who will take this boy, when every other lad is better, and ready for his work?"

"To have dreams and visions is a work that has never been well paid," said Dreese, "since the kings of Egypt and Babylon have ceased to exist. Were it not that Joseph and Daniel had kept up the honour of their comrades, the others would have been sent away by their lords long before!"

"He who takes Wiegen into his service can be certain that he does not get any one like Joseph or Daniel; those were clear-headed fellows, but this is a muddle-headed youngster."

"Yet everyone will have to agree that he is a good lad; he knows his Bible as few others in the parish do, even among the older people. And, although every other boy of his age runs after the girls in his spare time, he

sits with his mother. And he has never yet entered the public house."

"He had another vision last night," Schepers said; "I got it out of him. He was busy driving the sheep into the fold; it was late and almost dark. As he was counting, one, two, three, and so on, while he let them into the fold, an angel came flying from the West, a fiery angel, straight through the heavens in the direction of the fold, towards the East. The light was so strong that the earth was illumined by it, and Wiegen saw the brilliancy of it on his clothes and on the wool of the sheep; the light streamed in at the door and lighted up the farthest corner of the fold. He dared not look up, but he could see by the light on the ground that the angel flew fast. Neither did he look up when he heard the angel's voice. 'Purify the Church of the Lord!' the angel cried; 'convert the earth and its nations; they who bring about righteousness shall be the kingdom!' Wiegen was so confused that he had to count all the sheep over again, for he could not remember the last number."

"It must have been a falling star," Dreesse said, with a laugh, "a falling star, such as we have seen before. Who can make use of such a boy for work?"



The men had not noticed that a girl had approached the pump, carrying her pails. It was Wine, who had to fetch water for her mother, and at the same time for Wiegen's mother. She had finished some time ago, but she lingered, still busy; those pails seemed never to be full. But none of the men glanced at her, they were too deep in conversation.

"I think," Wendel remarked, "that Goesting should take him. Let Goesting do it. No one has so much patience as Goesting; when he has had him for a year or two, Wiegen will probably be able to dig the ground, and he will also be able to manage the horses and the plough and all the other things that a good farm-labourer should know. Wiegen will not like to be with any one in the village, he does not care for the chatter of the other boys; but the life on the moor, with you, Goesting, will please him. Then he will be among the pine-woods. He will imagine that he can dream there, but hard work will soon cure him of that."

The other men were all of the same opinion, and enlarged upon the subject, so that Goesting ended by saying: "If you all think that he should come to me, then it will have to

be, and I have no objections. Send him to me after Easter, Schepers."

"Look here, why are you listening?" Dreese exclaimed suddenly, for he had caught sight of the young girl. "Would you not like to put in a word or two when we are talking about the boys?"

The big girl's face crimsoned. She wanted to lift the pails from the ground and go away. But a sudden thought made her put them down again, and going up to the men she looked straight into Goesting's eyes and said: "I thank you, Goesting, that you will do what no one else would have done." Then she went; for her own words made her blush even more than Dreese's words had done.

"That is not like one of our girls," Dreese remarked; "which boy or girl in our village would let out that they had an understanding with one of the opposite sex?"

"And yet I know there is no understanding," Schepers answered; "that is to say, if love must come from two sides; for Wiegen has no feelings of that sort."

"You do not know anything about that, Schepers," Dreese said, "you, who have never been married!"

No one could see by Schepers' face what

was the sad answer he would have given, if he had spoken. For who, in the community, knew the history of the elder, who had also been young once?

"It is silly of Wiegen," Wendel observed; "one must be a dreamer to see nothing of the beauty of that girl, and to keep any one like that at arm's length!"

Not one of the men thought that Wendel had said anything wrong for an old man; their eyes were still the same eyes as they had had thirty or forty years before.

And so the men talked on about what they themselves had felt long ago.

Under the trees on the Square, they mapped out the lives of the people in their village, patriarchs in thoughts and deeds; until the moon shone through the oaks and the lights in the windows urged them to go home, where their wives and children awaited them for supper.

And after Easter, Wiegen, whose hair was cut short now, like that of the other boys, walked behind the cart on Goesting's farm with the reins in his hand, and he worked with a spade until in the evening his back was aching with the unusual labour.

But he could not forget how to dream, and the sleeping person in him, whom Wine would have liked to awaken, was as fast asleep as ever.

Who has ever heard that work can awaken love? If Wine did not do it herself, the sleeping person would never become a waking one!

And Wine realised this during the course of that year; and she realised it with tears, which she sometimes wept far away on the moor and sometimes in her small bedroom.

And when two or three years passed in this manner, she despaired that there could be anything about her and in her which would compel Wiegen the man to triumph, where now Wiegen the dreamer reigned.

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It was on an autumn evening that Wine came walking up to Goesting's farm. A fierce wind blew over the moor. It came from the North West and brought cold rain, which it drove across the hill. And the wind laughed, laughed boisterously, as he shook the oaks on Goesting's farm, for he wanted their branches, and got them too. And he laughed as he shook the fir-trees beyond; for he wished

to break them too; but they only swayed, being supple; they only dropped a few fir-cones to pacify him. But that made him angry, and with a fierce howl he swept on to fields and coppice, only to be back again a moment after.

He played havoc with the straw roof of the farm, and tried to carry off some straw. He made the most curious sounds, sometimes high up in the air, sometimes quite near the ground. And he made the cows on Goesting's meadow quite wet, so that they turned their heads away from him, under the alders which had never been felled, but which he now felled with a sharp sickle. Farther on in the orchard, he scattered the apples which Goesting had wished not to gather yet, thinking that they might improve if only the autumn sun would shine a few days longer. And away he soared, high up in the clouds, which he hurried on with wild leaps, as if they were sheep who could resist him. It was the first storm of that autumn, coming from the region where the other storms waited impatiently until their turn came to rage over sea and country.

But Wine had felt neither the wind nor the rain. How should she know that her head and hands were wet, and that her clothes clung



to her back and her strong shoulders! The storm within, which never abated, either by night or by day, was much worse than the storm without.

She did not go towards the door of the farm, but in the direction of the barn behind it. She looked in, but saw no one. She peeped into the stable, but the two horses were not there.

"He is certainly out on the field with the plough," she said aloud. And then she walked to the fields, the plough-land in the midst of the coppice. Wiegen drove the share through the rough unploughed soil. The two horses were in front of the plough, and the tall, slim, young man made a straight furrow.

Wine saw it, and she could not help saying: "He is as good a farm labourer as any other. Look how well he turns the plough; his arm is strong, and his hand firm! They are young horses, but they do what he wants them to do; he has a grip of them!"

And for a moment it was as if a light shone before her eyes. But it was not for long.

She walked over the lumps of sand, with legs wide apart, unevenly, in order to walk steadily and not to stumble. The soil was as rough as any she had ever walked upon. "How

is it that those farm labourers walk just as easily on it as on a level road?" she thought.

"Wiegen," she said, as he reined in the horses; "I have come from your mother. You must come home; she is much worse. The doctor has said that I must fetch you."

"I knew it," the young man said.

"How could you know it, Wiegen? Did any one come here to tell you, then?"

"I know so many things beforehand, Wine. But when I know it, I always think: 'How can I be sure that it is true?' It is no good to me, to know it sooner. For in any case I have to wait until the moment that it happens. And then every one else knows it too. That is why I did not come before you came to warn me."

"But how did you know it then, Wiegen?"

"It was in this way: A moment ago mother was here with me on the field. And she spoke to me; she said to me: 'You will be alone now, my boy!' 'That does not matter, mother,' I said, 'I have long been alone!' But why should I tell you all mother said to me? She walked beside me, next the plough, up and down, from that end of the field to here, and from here back again to the other end. And sometimes she held my arm, but that was difficult, because of the ploughing. And then

she threw her arms round my neck. I felt her tears against my cheek. A moment later she was gone. I did not see her any more. And so I knew that mother was going to die. I really thought she was dead already, and this was her farewell."

"Come with me, Wiegen; she is still alive!"

And then the man went back to the stable with the horses, and gave the animals fresh grass, throwing it into the manger. And he brought in the plough, for fear the rain might rust the iron, and he looked carefully if there were anything else to be done. Then he shut the door of the barn and said: "We will go; come along, Wine!"

"That is no dreamer," the girl thought; "look how he thinks of everything and arranges all, as every other good farmer would do."

But she knew quite well that this did not tally with what he had told her a moment ago about being able to foretell events. This gave the girl something new to worry about.

Silently the two people walked side by side. The wind blew the rain into their faces. Her skirts were blown about, and she had to put her feet down firmly to make any progress. But he walked as if there were no wind; his

step was the step of a strong man, Wine noticed

They did not speak one word. Occasionally she glanced up at his face, which had a set and beautiful expression, beautiful according to her ideas of manhood. It was not quite dark yet, so that she could still see it well. But she thought it would not be right to think of such things, not at such a time, at least.

And then she looked straight in front of her at the narrow path, taking care not to stumble, for the road was very uneven on account of the heath which had grown over it.

As they went, the path being narrow, their hands occasionally touched. It made her tremble, but she also thought that it was not right, this trembling, — not at such a time, at least.

And sometimes she wondered whether it was right that she should walk beside him. Why had she waited for him? Why had she not gone on while he was seeing about the horses? Now, while he was thinking of his mother, surely she should not come between those two? She wished that the road were wider, or that it were possible for her not to think of him.

But all at once — what was that she heard?

— He was sobbing; Wiegen, the great strong man! She could not believe her ears; for the men in Eastloorn never wept when any one else was there. They were all strong in selfcontrol. She had never been able to understand it, for it took very little to make her weep. She was always ashamed of it when it happened; but she could not help it.

There, she heard it again. No, it must have been the wind; she must have been mistaken. But she had to look at him once more: she must have certainty. And she saw that large tears fell from under his drooping eyelids.

And she did not know what she was doing.

“Poor boy!” she cried. And her strong arms were round his neck and her lips were against his lips, for one moment wildly, full of pity and passion.

But she immediately realised what she had done. Her arms let go, she gave a shriek of shame and rushed wildly on through the wind and rain, leaving the young man in blank surprise, his thoughts about his mother who was ill and dying suddenly mixed up with other thoughts and wonderful questions which he could not answer.

A short time after he stood beside his mother.

But that mother was dead. It had been



true after all; she had come to him outside on the fields. She had not left him without a farewell. His mother had embraced him and kissed him.

And then he thought of the other one who had also embraced him and kissed him.

A few neighbours came in and out. He could not understand what they talked about. Most of them were women. But they made him understand that he must leave the room. When he came back later on, his mother lay straight and still in pure white clothes, as was customary there.

That night he remained alone with the dead body.

"He does not wish us to stay there to-night;" the women said to one another behind the barn. "What man has ever kept watch alone with a dead body? That is a thing one can only expect from the Dreamer! But leave him alone, if he wishes it."

It was past midnight, and the boy still sat on the chair which he had drawn up close to his mother's bed.

A small lamp, such as the farmers use, burned on the table and shed its light on the face of the dead woman, for Wiegen had pulled

back the sheet and sat watching the face all the time. He liked that.

It seemed to him as if she were asleep, and as if she would wake up afterwards and talk to him again. He liked watching that face, it lay there, looking so peaceful, so pure and sweet. Were there any wrinkles on that forehead? No, they were gone; a pure light illuminated that forehead.

And were the lips still so tightly pressed together, as the lips of people who must work hard and exert themselves? No, the lips were apart, as of people who need have no care either for their daily bread or for anything else.

And the eyes were closed so peacefully; if she were to open them again, it would be with the look of some one who has no more wishes, because all wishes have been fulfilled. And then those eyes would look at him, as if they were saying: "Wiegen, my boy, I am now in the land where no one is poor, and where no one suffers; you must come here too, later on!"

He heard the wind against the window-panes. He looked up. "Those windows should be able to stand the wind a few years longer; they are not very old yet," he thought. "It was only last year that I mended them; but it would

not do for the storm to become worse; otherwise my roof might be damaged; and what Goesting gives me in six weeks will not be enough to pay for that too."

When he looked back at the bed, his mother's eyes were wide open and she was gazing at him.

"Have you waked up, mother?"

"Yes, my boy, I have something to say to you. When I was with you on the field this afternoon, you had no time to attend to me. You went on ploughing. You would not stand still. But that was quite right. A good labourer must put work first; must he not, my boy?"

"But I knew you were with me, mother! You kissed me!"

It is easily understood why that made an impression on him. For ever since he was a boy his mother had never kissed him. That was not the custom among the mothers of Eastloorn.

"Why is it we never do that any more, when our boys grow up?" she said. "We must be curious women here. Our hearts make us long for it always, and yet we do it not. We are a strong people and do not give in to such emotions. Who taught us to control ourselves where it is not necessary?"

Her lips moved in a mechanical, almost cold, manner, as of a person whose lips will never more be moved by any passion. Her hands also lay still and quiet under the sheet, while her feet were quite rigid.

"Are you alive, mother, or are you dead? Did the women lay you out too soon?"

"No, I am dead, my boy. But I have something else to say to you, and it is this: Has Wine never kissed you?"

"Yes, mother; this afternoon, when I was walking here from Goesting's. She was walking beside me. And it was at the turning of the path on the moor, there where the old oak stands. You know that oak which grew bent because formerly it was struck by lightning and lost half of its branches."

"Did Wine really do that? That is not like the women of these parts either!"

"She looked up at my eyes, and when she noticed that I was weeping, she was touched with pity. Her arms were round my neck and her lips on my mouth. "Poor boy!" she said. I do not know how it came about, mother. But all of a sudden she had gone, rushed on in front of me to the village." He related the incident slowly, as if he wished to feel it all over again, as he had felt it then.

"That was good of Wine," the mother remarked. "Who has ever been sorry for you, my boy? Not even your mother!"

Then it was quiet in the room for a long time, and once more the wind and rain beat against the panes.

At last the woman continued: "Should you not let Wine do the housekeeping here in my place, Wiegen? Some one must look after you?"

He did not answer, and she went on:

"When you were a shepherd boy on the moor all these years your thoughts wandered, and you became a dreamer. It was not looking after the sheep only, that caused it, for it was in you. But you kept it up too long, and then you could not stop dreaming. You have improved since you went to Goesting's, but you must go further. To work is life, Wiegen, and not to dream! And to love is life even more!"

"How am I to know if I am dreaming now, or if I am not dreaming, mother? Is all this really happening, or is it not, mother?"

She did not answer at once, but went on after a little:

"Have you ever looked into her eyes, my boy? What sort of eyes are they? What sort of lips are they? And lower down; have you ever looked at those arms? And is she not



tall and strong? Is there a girl in the parish so pretty as Wine, Wiegen?"

There was the sound of thunder outside, a long and heavy roll of thunder, as one often hears in autumn, — loud because it is rare. The windows shook and the old house trembled. The wind, carrying with it torrents of rain, seized the planks of the outhouse beneath; they groaned to remain attached to each other. And outside on the street, the people shouted out from the one house to the other, people who had waked up and come out to have a look.

Wiegen jumped up with a start, ran to the window, and looked out. But there was no second roll of thunder, as is often the case in autumn. He sat down again on the chair beside the bed. The light of the lamp fell on the dead face. The eyes were shut now and the lips closed, the arms stiff beneath the sheet, and the feet rigid.

So Wiegen was sitting when the morning dawned, and he heard the first cart on the street, going to the field. That he knew was Wendel's cart; his man never walked beside the horses, but always sat crooked on the box whether the cart were full or empty. He was rather lazy, the other men in Eastloorn said.

The day came for Wiegen.

He knew not whether he had slept that night there on his chair. One thing was certain, he was awake now.

Neither did he know what he was to think of that conversation between him and his mother. Did that also belong to the realm of visions and dreams? Was it real, or was it not real? And might it not be the mixed feelings which the sad death of his mother and the first kiss which he had received from a strange woman had roused in him? He did not know, and worried about it.

But the fact that he did not know showed that Wiegen had made progress. Some years ago he would certainly have looked upon it as a vision.

On the day after the funeral Wine came very early in the morning.

The door was open; Wiegen, of course, was up already. He had to go to Goesting's; he had to be there, as he had always been, before the old farmer and his wife were up. A good labourer in Eastloorn had done a good deal before the master and his wife came out.

"I have come to make your coffee, as I have always done for your mother," she said;

and, with the coffee-mill between her knees, she started grinding, while Wiegen watched her for a moment.

He considered it quite natural that she did it.

She did not look up; for she thought of him as of one who had lost his mother. "I may not come between him and his mother," went though her mind constantly.

The fire was on the wide hearth and the kettle hung over it; Wiegen had seen to that. "I should not have imagined that the Dreamer would have thought of such things; I thought he would have run away to the farmer's without any coffee."

"What a queer way that boy is behaving!" she thought again, without looking up. "One moment he is standing by the window, then by the fire, then at the door. Dreaming again?"

But he was not dreaming. His eyes were always fixed on her, whether he was standing by the door, or by the window, or at the fire. He looked at her mouth, of which his mother had spoken; and lower down at her arms and at the strength and beauty in her. He also wished that he could see those eyes of which his mother had spoken; for he could not remember ever having looked into her eyes. He must make her look up.

"Wine," he said, and nothing else.

He saw into those eyes, those large eyes, and in them he read a question, a great question. She did not look like a happy girl.

"How long have you been grieving, Wine?"

"Have I been grieving, Wiegen? How do you know that?"

"I must tell you about mother, I spoke with her when she was lying here dead that night; she talked with me all night."

"Have you been having dreams and visions again, boy?" And an even more miserable look came into her eyes than before.

"No, listen to me," and he told her what his mother had said to him when she awoke on her bed of death.

The girl blushed a deep red when he finished speaking. She took the coffee-mill from between her knees, got up and went to the fire, which suddenly seemed to require her attention. "Silly dreams, Wiegen, you know that as well as I do! Your mother did not wake up at all; the dead do not come to life again. Those are your own thoughts which come out of your own head, and which you imagine came from your mother!" But she was glad that his own thoughts suddenly took that shape.

But Wiegen had seen the blush. His eyes had been opened, he who had been blind now saw for the first time what beauty there was in the rosy colour on a girl's cheeks.

And his eyes had been opened to more than that. Standing behind her, he saw the whiteness of a neck, the blackness of thick, tied-up hair; standing behind her, he saw the curve of her shoulders, the rounded shape of her hips. The seer had in truth become seeing!

A leap, a wild leap, and his arms were about her; and his face bent over the frightened head of the girl.

An unchained passion had swept over him, as a wild stream which breaks through the dikes for the first time. And in the girl's heart was a great fear which made her think: "I have done this! Oh, I have unchained this passion!"

"Let me go, Wiegen! Remember your mother, who was buried only yesterday. It is a sin!"

"It is no sin!" Wiegen shouted, "mother told me herself!"

And in those strong arms, out of which she could not free herself, Wine surrendered to the might which was stronger than both of them together. There was no more resisting.



The day had dawned for Wiegen. The sleeping being in him had awakened.

"Let me go now, Wiegen," she said gently, at last; a good labourer must not be too late at his work. I shall be here again this evening. You shall be happy, my boy, as you have never been before; and I shall not grieve any more!"

The man went away, without coffee and without bread.

But that did not matter; Goesting's wife would give it him. She had often done so before; not only to him, but also to the other men, for she was a good mistress to her servants.

There was much laughter among some of the girls in the village when every evening those two people were seen together, and when it became known that there was something between Wiegen and Wine.

"Have you heard it?" they enquired of each other at the pump on the Square.

"That Dreamer is well off," they said, for Wine was in high favour with all the village girls, for she had never interfered with their affairs; she had never thought of the other boys. Which of them could have a grudge against her then?

"But how can she want such a boy?"

"He is not made of flesh and blood; he is a spirit, such as the spirits he sees and talks with!"

"His arm will be cold, and cold his eyes!"

"It would make me creepy to live with him; there will be ghosts in the night."

"Come, come, it is not so bad as all that! But she might have looked about her more and done better than that!"

On such an evening there came no end to the filling of the pails, the bottomless pails! But if the girls had known of the passion which had become unchained, they would have said to themselves with girlish jealousy: "What a lucky girl!"

The old minister was one of those who did not laugh.

In spite of himself, he had become a psychologist during the course of years. Whenever he had noticed the symptoms he always ferreted out the causes.

"What has changed the Dreamer so?" he asked of himself.

And, as he pondered, he looked up at the appletree under which he stood, at the last apples which were still hanging there, and which the gardener had forgotten to pick.

"Govert always leaves too many; he is getting too old, he cannot see when he gathers them.

"I wonder what has changed the Dreamer so?... Ah, I know it! I did it on that day when I told him he must stop looking after the sheep! That was when it began! Work, work has changed him!"

And the old minister laughed; he also laughed, but it was different to the laughing of the girls on the Square.

"But what is that? Has old Govert tied up the roses in straw for the winter, after I had told him that it was too soon, and that the roses would be in flower in no time! A self-opinionated ass, he is! I shall have to look out for a new gardener before I die!" And he went to look in the outhouse, to see whether he could find the ass.

"Yet it might be that I was not the cause of Wiegen's change. For work is not the father of love. A fine thing that! Laziness is the field on which love grows! In the summer the boys do not think of it; they have too much to do on the fields! No, the winter is their time, when there is nothing to do!"

And again the old man laughed, and forgot to look for his gardener.

"One thing I know, and it is this; the

Dreamer will forget all about his kingdom of heaven in the way he thought of the kingdom! When love is really there, all people are cured of their socialistic dream-states. Another one has been cured here!"

And again the old minister laughed, more merrily than many old men in his parish and in other parishes.

That old man went laughing to his grave.

But had he asked Wine what had cured the Dreamer, she would not have given him the answer. For she knew it!

With a shame which long afterwards when she thought of it, brought a blush to her cheeks, she always remembered: "It was the kiss which I gave him at the turning of the path, under the old gnarled oak tree, the kiss which I gave him there, that woke up the sleeper!"

But when Wiegen was a married man among the men of Eastloorn, and when several children sat with him round his table, the Dreamer in him had not altogether disappeared. He had understood that the kingdom of heaven is righteousness, — righteousness and nothing else. All earthliness had gone out of his dream. The old minister, the psychologist, had been right; the home is the greatest

enemy of every socialistic state or dream-state, and Wiegen had a family now! All that remained to him of his dreams was what the minister had told him, and what his Bible taught him daily: that the kingdom of heaven is righteousness, — righteousness and nothing else.

But it was just that thought which, in future, made him attach little importance to an outward church.

"I have a church of my own," he used to say, when the conversation turned upon it in the evening on the Square; for he also liked to be there among the other men. "I have a church of my own, and those who work righteousness, those are the members of my church!"

Such doings and such sayings made the minister put on a doubtful face when he heard it, and made Wiegen keep the nickname which he had in his village.

No one agreed with him in those ideas; for who was there in the parish who unwittingly did not honour the visible form of the kingdom, namely, the Church, above the kingdom itself? No, those were only Wiegen's dreams!

And that was why he was called the Dreamer all his days.

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## II

### THE SECESSION

To enable the reader to understand the subject dealt with in the following chapter, a short explanation seems essential.

The great or National Church in the Netherlands is the Dutch Reformed Church, which, in former days, was practically co-extensive with the country. In the course of time there were several secessions. Many people who were not satisfied with the Dutch Reformed Church left it, and formed new churches, which gradually grew in strength. The last of these dissensions, the one referred to in the following chapter, took place in 1886 and 1887, and those who brought it about called themselves the Doleful Dissenters.

The Dissension had come also to Eastloorn; it had come with storms and thunderclouds.

This had surprised many people. It was not like these quiet people living in Overijssel, near the Vecht, to join in the strife. In accordance with their peace-loving natures, the Dissension should have come about without

any excitement at all. This was not the case, however.

And for many years after both the members of the Reformed Church and those of the Dissenting Church had felt deeply ashamed.

They could never quite forget that they had allowed themselves to be carried along on the stream of passion, they who, as a rule, knew so well how to keep their emotions in check. Long after the storm had abated and the Dissenting Church had been established, the members of either church were afraid to look each other in the face. And this was not caused by any feelings of enmity, but by a deep sense of shame; the enmity was blowing over rapidly, but the sense of shame remained.

It was not that they felt ashamed of the act itself, or of the principle which had prompted it — the principle to which both parties clung with great persistence, — but they felt ashamed because they had not controlled their passions, and because the gentle nature, which had always characterized the inhabitants of East-loorn for many generations, had been lost for a while, so that their parish in those days was exactly like so many other parishes in Holland, where the standard of civilisation was much lower.

The Secession had come about in this way. It was Senserff who had taken the first steps towards it. He had been in Eastloorn for four years then. He was the successor of the old minister, who had died. The Synodical yoke had begun to oppress him, and by degrees he had made this clear to his elders and churchwardens. And on the Sunday before New Year's Eve he had announced from the pulpit that he and his elders, in name of the whole congregation, had thrown off the Synodical yoke, and that from that moment they were going to place themselves again under the ecclesiastical organisation of the year 1619.

There had been much talk about this step among the men and women in the village.

"Do you think the minister does not know what he must do?" many of them asked others, who wondered quietly whether the minister and his elders had been quite justified in taking this step.

"He has been here long enough to pass for one of us now; we all know him, and if one did not know it, one would think he had been born and bred here; he has never yet been unjust, so this must be right too!"

"But," the others timidly objected, "if he wants to do a thing like that, let him do it for

himself alone, and let the elders do it for themselves. But they are taking this step for the whole parish; surely they might have asked our opinion first!"

"You do not understand the matter," was the answer; "the minister and his elders act in our place and for us."

It was just this that these simple-minded men could not grasp.

But there was yet another consideration.

"We do not want to belong to a new Church," the people said. "This is a novelty which has come from Holland;\* ) we have read of it in the papers. Let them go in for novelties in Holland if they like; they are not for us; let us keep to the old customs and decrees which were always good enough for our forefathers. Do you think I want to belong to a different Church to the one my father and my mother belonged to? My forefathers, as far as I know, have always belonged to this Church; why then should I join a new one?"

"You do not understand," those in favour of the Secession said; "you will now return to the old Church to which your ancestors

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\*) Here the province North-Holland is meant.

and parents belonged. We are going to join the old Church, the Reformed Church, which we have left."

But they could not be made to see it.

How could one establish a new Church and yet belong to the old Church?

They remembered the time of their confirmation, when they had promised in that very building to be faithful to the Church, and they could not break this promise.

They remembered the times when they had partaken of Holy Communion in that Church, and how then could they leave it?

They remembered how their children had been christened there.

They remembered the graves which were there, along the outer wall of the church, where their grandparents and those who had lived before them lay buried. True, now there was a new cemetery, and they were not allowed to bury their dead in the old place; but that ground near the outer wall of the church was sacred ground.

They remembered it all! And it made them feel as if they were emigrants who were about to sell all they possessed, and who were going to leave house and home to cross the sea and live in a strange country.



They could not understand how the new Church could be the old one.

"We will explain it to you," those in favour of the Secession said again. "Our Church has departed from the old paths, and this has been going on for some time. It is no longer what the old Church was, and if now we establish a new Church, that new Church will be the old Church!"

They grasped it to a certain extent, but not as the others did.

And in this manner they had thought and talked not only during that week, but during the whole spring and the whole summer and the whole winter.

Other things had occurred which had helped matters on, but, although his cause was furthered by them, these things had not pleased Senserff.

It was towards midsummer that the German mowers came to the village. They were accustomed to come every year at that particular time. They came from Germany and made their way to Friesland, going in a north-westerly direction across the province of Overijsel. They went to Friesland to mow the grass on the wide meadows, for the Frisian

farmers never had enough men to do the work, so they always got the German mowers to help. And these men worked there for weeks and weeks at a time.

It was towards evening when they passed through Eastloorn. The tall men were walking two and two, with their scythes swung loosely across their shoulders, each one with his knapsack.

When they came to the Square they stood still to decide whether they should go on, or spend the night in the village. The young men among them seemed to wish to go on, but the older ones, who had done the same thing often before, advised them to stop for the night and rest, so that next day they would be able to continue their journey right into the middle of Friesland, as they had done the years before. And the younger men did as their elders advised.

They took their scythes from their shoulders and put them on the ground near the church wall; then they sat down by the wall and took bread and bacon out of their sacks to eat. Those who were thirsty drank water from the pump which stood in the middle of the Square. They were peaceful men, who never did any one any harm. The people in

Eastloorn knew many of the older men among them; they came regularly every year, and Schepers and Raders came out of their houses and talked with them as with old friends.

And after they had finished their meal they lay down on the ground by their scythes and rested their heads on their sacks. It was their usual resting-place, and they slept soundly after their long day's tramp.

Next day, before any one in the village was up, they were gone on their way to the North.

It was only a flying visit, but, if that visit had not taken place, there would have been an annual event fewer to record in Eastloorn.

No one could tell afterwards who had spread the tale, but the next day it ran through the village like wildfire that the German mowers had seen blood on the threshold of the church. Early in the morning, before sunrise, they had seen a little stream of blood coming from the inside of the church, and trickling down the steps on to the Square; red blood!

No one ever knew who was the first to spread the report; but all day long a crowd of men and women stood on the steps trying to make out where that stream of blood had flowed.

Most people considered it a bad omen, even though the blood was no longer to be seen.

Surely something was going to happen! And it must be in connection with the church; why should it have been seen there and nowhere else?

Senserff also stood still a moment as he came past, and he laughed heartily when he was told what had taken place. He could never have believed that his parishioners would be so superstitious. He laughed and joked about it to all those who were standing near, so that they soon found out that he did not attach any importance to the rumour.

"Look here," he said, much amused, "this is where the blood flowed. I can see it quite distinctly! Do you not see the stain?" And he laughed and joked so much about the matter that at last the people went away, for they did not like to contradict him.

But that evening and during the following days Senserff did not laugh any more, for hundreds of people believed that it was a token from Heaven sent as a warning to leave the Church.

"It is quite clear," the people said; "we must do as the minister says and leave the Reformed Church!"

Senserff and his elder, Schepers, might contradict it as much as they liked; it was of no avail. And it made the minister

feel very bitter to think that the cause for which he was working so hard was being furthered in this manner.

"If my men do not feel that there are higher motives than these in favour of the Secession," he said, "then I shall have to give up the idea altogether."

Matters were not improved, according to his thinking, when a little incident which had taken place in spring was remembered.

A hawk had come flying across the moor from a great distance, and this hawk had made its home in the church tower.

The pigeons, which had had their nests there as long as people could remember, had flown away rapidly down to the houses, where they sat on the roofs, since there they were safe and no hawk would venture near.

Yet the schoolboys had seen how the hawk had got hold of one, and they had enjoyed the sight. The hawk had carried the pigeon to the tower, and a short time after feathers were seen blowing about in all directions. They had picked up the feathers, some of which were stained with blood, and pointed them out to each other in great excitement.

Some of the pigeons tried to get back to



the tower, for they had left their eggs and young birds behind. Their mother's instinct constantly drove them back toward the nests, but they never got very near, for they always caught sight of the hawk just as they were nearing their goal! And many a dove had to pay dearly for its maternal love!

And Senserff heard the people talk about this as if it also were a sign from heaven. The Church was no longer a refuge and a shelter for believers. What else could the coming of the hawk mean?

"We must do as the minister tells us," they would say, as they stood together on the Square in the evening; "the house of the Lord has become a murderer's den, and it cannot be the right place for us any longer. We are told to leave the old Church, it is quite clear!"

At any time of the day one could see a crowd of people gazing up at the tower; and whenever the hawk flew out great excitement prevailed among old and young.

Senserff talked with them, but it was of no avail. He tried joking about it; he tried being angry; nothing helped. He was absolutely powerless; no one contradicted, but their superstition was quite evident.

"Schepers," Senserff said one day, as he

entered his house, "I know you have an excellent rifle, for I have seen it. Will you lend it to me? I want to shoot that hawk!"

"Can you shoot, sir?" Schepers said, dubiously.

"Where is your rifle, Schepers? Leave the shooting to me! I assure you that hawk will not live much longer. There must be an end to this silly superstition!"

And after that the minister was often seen walking in his garden, carrying the rifle. And he was always gazing up at the sky. He was seen in his garden very early in the morning, before many of the labourers were up and at work.

And one fine morning the hawk was actually shot. The report soon spread through the village.

The schoolboys crowded round the gate with eager faces, hoping to see the hawk and possibly to get it. Senserff tried hard to conceal his anger as he threw them the bird; they might nail it up on the schoolroom wall, near the side entrance, so that every one might see what had become of the token from heaven.

And in the afternoon, when he stood chatting to some men near the pump in the Square, his words were a little bitter. "The tower is safe again, men; do you see it? The evil one

has been driven away, and every one can see by this that we must not join the Secession."

"The minister is quite right," the men said, later on; "the hawk was a token for us to leave the old Church; and now the hawk is dead it is a sign that we can stay!"

But they secretly thought the first token was stronger than the second, and it was almost a foregone conclusion that the Secession would have to take place.

Senserff had very little satisfaction for his trouble. He often wondered whether Eastloorn was the right place to start this great work and whether his people were ripe for it. And he wondered still more when he heard his more enlightened parishioners laugh and scoff at the superstitions of the others.

Had it not been for his elders, who were the best men in the parish and who had a deeper insight into the reasons for a Secession, and who stuck to him through thick and thin with much common sense and pure motives, he would have given it all up and there might never have been a Secession in Eastloorn. The second church would never have been built!

And yet it had come about, at last!

On the Sunday preceding New Year's Eve Senserff had announced from the pulpit that the congregation had, by this deed, been set free from the Synodical yoke, and that they had placed themselves once more under the ecclesiastical organisation of the year 1619.

A sudden storm arose when the service was over.

The thing which had been thought about in silence and talked over quietly now caused almost an uproar. Those in favour of the Secession and those against it had discussed the matter quite peacefully before, but now it became a subject for much dispute. All their pent-up feelings seemed to break loose in these conversations, and they talked to each other as if they were enemies.

Who would have recognised the people of Eastloorn in those days?

People who at other times never accompanied their words with gestures stood on the Square, gesticulating violently, almost menacingly. People who had been friends all their lives passed each other on the street without greeting. Those who were accustomed to drop in at each other's houses every evening to discuss the daily news passed each other's doors as if strangers dwelt there. The peace

was disturbed in many a home. Violent scenes took place between fathers and sons, between mothers and daughters.

Where were the gentle manners which were a heritage in Eastloorn?

There was only one man who remained calm during the storm. It was Wiegen, the Dreamer.

"It does not seem to affect you!" the people said to him, and they said it almost sullenly.

He looked quietly into their eyes.

"Do you not care then which of the two parties wins?" they would say; for they were curious to know what his thought were.

"Oh," he would answer, "what does it matter who wins? The Church is not the Kingdom of Heaven. And the new Church which is coming will not be, either. Righteousness is the Kingdom of Heaven; and he who is righteous does not require either the old or the new Church!"

These discussions always took place on the Square.

"Your minister shall not mount the pulpit again!" the doctor, who was a churchwarden, remarked.

He was an old man of seventy, and the oldest friend of all men and women under fifty. He had stood beside their cradles, and



the mothers in the village could not have wished for a better doctor.

"Your minister has freed himself from our Church, and he shall not mount our pulpit again! And I shall do my duty as churchwarden!"

"And if there is no other minister on New Year's Eve, who will preach the sermon then?" one of the bystanders said in rather a rude voice.

"I do not know!" the doctor answered; "but it shall not be he! If no one else is sent the church shall remain closed! And that will be the first fruit of his obstinacy. When has that ever taken place before in Eastloorn, no service on New Year's Eve?"

"And yet the minister shall mount the pulpit!" the others shouted; "we will see about that! You who remain under the Synodical organisation have nothing to say now. We shall appoint new churchwardens! What do you say to that, doctor?"

"I say this, that your minister will have to leave his house too! Those who leave our Church cannot live in the vicarage belonging to that Church either! You had better build a new church and a new vicarage! But he shall not stay in ours!"

Several tall boys were standing among the men who were quarrelling with the doctor, and they thrust out their hands and shouted: "Drive him away from the Square, men! He had better not talk ill of our minister!"

But the doctor stood fearlessly among the throng of excited people, fearlessly as a man who had grown old among them. Laughingly he exclaimed:

"Which boy said that? Bring him to me; I should like to see how long ago it is since I took him from his mother and laid him, a naked child, in his nurse's arms."

The boys were ashamed; and even the older ones knew they had been wanting in respect towards the doctor.

On New Year's Eve, when the people were on their way to church, there was a greater tension than any of them had ever experienced before.

Every one had come, even those who lived on the most distant farms and in the huts far away on the moor. The village was astir with men and women.

"Who is going to preach this evening?" those who came from a distance asked.

"Our minister, of course," was the answer.

But others said: "The doctor is going to have the church closed, if no other minister is sent!"

It was a cold winter evening, and there was a thick layer of snow on the houses and trees.

There was light in the church; it lit up the windows and made a light on the snow-covered trees.

When the clock had struck six and the bell-ringer had started ringing, there was no sign of a cab on the road: there was not even the light of a carriage lantern to be seen in the distance. Evidently no other minister was going to turn up.

"Then you must not let any one in," the doctor said to Ilting, the verger; "put out the lights and let the people go home."

But the doctor had not taken his opponents into account. Hundreds of people gathered round the church door and pushed against it, wanting to come in. These hundreds were Senserff's friends. The Anti-dissenters stood a little further up, on the Square. And when Ilting, the verger, put his head out of a little church-window and explained to the people that there would be no service and that the church was to remain closed, by order of the doctor, a terrible incident took place, an

incident about which the inhabitants of Eastloorn still feel ashamed.

"We will come in!" they shouted, "and the minister shall preach!"

"The verger is putting out the lights!" the others shouted, for they saw the light shining more and more faintly through the windows.

And then it happened in a single moment. The crowd pushed and pushed against the church doors, old doors, which had stood there for many years. They surged into the church, shouting wildly: "Senserff shall preach!"

And Senserff was actually seen, carried along by the stream, trying to clear his way to the pulpit.

Those who were not in favour of the Secession could not come in; the others kept them out with the cry: "The church is ours!" The doctor's party now understood that it was all caused by a shrewd plot on the part of the Dissenters to be at the church doors early. And, knowing that they had been deceived, their fury reached its culminating point. They almost started to fight outside the door. But the doctor prevented that.

"Come here, men!" he cried, "to the door of the tower!"

And, as he always carried the key of that

door with him, he opened it, and so the Anti-dissenters made their way in a long line up the narrow stairs. They reached the organ. From there they climbed down by the railing. One after the other they came into the church, helping each other, and in a short space of time there were as many Anti-dissenters as Dissenters in the building.

There was a terrible confusion.

But suddenly, in the midst of this confusion, a voice started singing the well-known New Year's Eve hymn: — "Hours, days, months, years pass away like a shadow." That was the sign for the doctor's party. A hundred strong voices joined in and it sounded like a war-cry. But soon the others were trying to outdo them with their own war-cry: —

"Let God arise, and scattered  
 Let all his enemies be,  
 And let all those that do him hate  
 Before his presence flee!"

Here and there, the people were fighting in the pews.

And no one can tell what the end of it all might have been if at that moment the mayor and his two policeman had not climbed down by the organ and made it plain to the



people by gesticulating that the church must be cleared.

The policemen did their work quickly, starting with the men who were nearest them. Those further up had not seen the mayor yet, and there the fight in song had changed into a fight with fists.

Senserff stood in the pulpit, pale and with tears in his eyes, tears of a man disillusioned about his own followers, who had evidently not understood in what way the work of the Dissension had to be taken up and spread. He climbed down from the pulpit, as if he wanted to be the first to obey the mayor's command. But his followers shouted: "Stay where you are, sir; we will uphold you!" That hurt him more than anything.

After a quarter of an hour the stream of people had filed out of the church, fighting here and there in the dark. One or two of them still continued the skirmish, and in the church there lay a wounded man and another on the high steps. So there had been bloodshed too.

The next day, on New Year's morning, many people thought of what the German mowers had seen on the morning after they had slept there, as they did every year. It was not necessary for Senserff to joke about it, as

he had done on that day, saying: "Do you not see the blood, I do!" For every one saw the blood on the threshold of the church and in the snow. And so the Secession had come about in Eastloorn, with storms and thunder-clouds, such as had not been known before in the annals of the Church.

When on that New Year's morning a crowd of people stood together on the Square, all talking about the events of the night before, defending the old Church or the new one with a violence which had calmed down a little, suddenly, during a lull in the conversation, a voice was heard in their midst: "Alas, alas! Now there is no one who belongs to my Church any more; I alone am left!"

They all looked round, and when they saw who had spoken, they said: "Oh, it is only Wiegen, the Dreamer!"

A year later, there was a new church, a smaller one, in Eastloorn. It was the Dissenters' church. There was also a new vicarage. And Senserff had to move into it. And a new minister had preached his first sermon in the Reformed Church. This was Walter, a young minister, quite fresh from the University.

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### III

## HARDERS

The richest farm in Eastloorn was that owned by Harders.

One could see it from the village lying beyond the marsh by the river. And very often the villagers' eyes, especially those of the poorer ones, wandered in that direction, and if they happened to be off their guard, those eyes were covetous. For it was a grand sight.

When Walter was on his way to pay his first visit there, — for Harders belonged to the Reformed Church and had not taken part in the Secession — his admiration got the better of him, although he had made up his mind beforehand not to admire. For Walter had a rooted objection to rich farmers.

"Stupid fellows," he had said on one occasion to his University friend, Van Geuns, who was staying with him; "stupid fellows, those rich farmers! They are no better than

the poorest villagers in point of education. The poorest labourer in their service is on a higher plane. It is simply the money which makes the difference."

"That is no reason for disliking those rich farmers," Van Geuns answered. "If, in point of education, they are on the same level, you should have just as much respect for both, or no respect at all for either; but you should make no difference. Surely it cannot annoy you that they have a little more money than the others. I have never yet had to accuse you of socialistic jealousy."

"No, but if those stupid fellows are conceited and give themselves airs and play the mayor without being it, and have a look in their eyes as if they were saying: 'I shall be kind and lenient with you to-day because, after all, you are the minister,' then I wonder if you would not dislike those fellows too!"

For this reason Walter had made up his mind on no account to admire Harders' great and imposing possessions. He was convinced that everything he should see and all that the farmer could say to him would seem trivial in his eyes.

But it had all come about in a different way, from the very beginning.

When he had crossed the village bridge and turned into the road which would bring him to Harders' dwelling, "Great Bule," he enjoyed walking on the narrow path across the meadows. The sun was not yet high in the heavens; it was still early and he liked the heat of it on his back. The plovers flew up at his feet; they shot up into the air, sideways, then almost touched him and away again. "Yes, my friends, I know you," he thought aloud, "you think I have come to take away your eggs. Do not be alarmed; I will not harm you." The houses of the village seemed far off. He could see all about him; everything was wide, and far and free. Instinctively, his step became elastic. Oh! how delightful it was, the wind coming from one side! He stretched out his arms as if to embrace the wind; and he inhaled it deep into his lungs.

"A happy man who possesses this land!" he thought.

And he knew that all this land belonged to Harders!

Farther on, he walked among the cows, like great patches of black and white and red against the green of the fields. "How many may there be?" he thought. But he did not try to count them. As far as he could see,



those patches of black and white and red were visible. When he approached them, they rose up suddenly and got out of his way with a frightened leap, turning their horns towards him. But he was not afraid, he liked to see them even better in this way than on canvas.

"A lucky man who possesses all these cattle!" he thought.

And he knew that all these cows belonged to Harders.

And then he came to the fields of clover, fields of potatoes, long and wide. Among the clover, he saw the mowers, Harders' men standing with their legs wide apart, their heads erect, swinging their arms. He heard the sharpening of the scythes, the wood coming into sharp contact with them. He saw the clover falling at the mowers' feet, juicy and tender, wafting a wonderful fragrance towards him. He picked an ear of rye as he went, an ear that promised to become heavy in time. But a noisy flutter of partridges, suddenly flying up, made him look round; and he wished for a gun at that moment.

"How delightful to be master here," he thought, "to be farmer and hunter and king!"

And he knew that Harders was farmer and hunter and king here!

And when he had passed the fields he came to the great trees which surrounded Harders' farm. And this was "Great Bule!" It was cool under those trees, and the shade was pleasant, and he smelt the scent of divers foliage. He clasped his arms round the trunk of one of these giants and tried to measure its thickness. There were many like this one. "It must be a hundred years old and date from the time of Harders' grandfather or great-grandfather!"

"There is something, after all," he mused, "in possessing a patrimonial estate, and in being able to say: "Here my father and grandfather lived, and they too got it from their fathers. Think of those poor wretches in a town who hire a house, and give themselves airs with it! and the foolish parvenus, who build a new villa surrounded with shrubs and bushes three feet high. Just compare it with this!"

His admiration had got the better of him. And he knew that those trees and that farm belonged to Harders!

And he saw the house surrounded with barns; high strong barns of stone and of wood and with thick thatched roofs. That one was for the hay; that for the corn; another

for the cattle. He saw inside the stables through the open doors, the empty stables pure and clean. There was much running about of men and maids coming and going without an order; each one knew his task from the morning to the evening. And to crown all those buildings, there straight in front of him stood the house, the plaster work of purest white, the wooden frames of windows and blinds green, and above the red tiles; the house with wide high steps — and — on those steps —

Instinctively Walter took off his hat, — that man up there on those steps was Harders.

“Well, how did you get on?” Van Geuns enquired on Walter's return. “I am quite sure that you joined in the general worship of great and rich men, and that you bowed deeply to Harders, the farmer, the very man you were reviling before.”

“How do you know that?” Walter answered, and he had the look of a man who feels very much ashamed, and has yet no intention of hiding the fact. On the contrary, it seemed quite possible that if this shame should turn into anger, he would not be able to restrain himself.

"How do I know that? — well, it is a very natural symptom, very human, very human! First we abuse those great and rich men, and that, of course, is jealousy! Ha, ha! who is not jealous sometimes? And a moment after we encounter that great man, and without knowing it we take off our hats, very deeply and very humbly. I am convinced that you took off your hat to Harders, did you not?"

"How do you know that?" Walter's voice sounded distinctly gruff; surely, his anger could not be far off.

"Just as I thought, you were very humble; you bowed low, my man, and shook hands, and you smiled in an ingratiating way, as if you wanted to say: 'Look here, we must be good friends; will you? You are a great man; but so am I in my own way, and we two must join together for the good of the parish!' And it is quite natural that you did this. Who would have acted otherwise? All people are the same. And Walter, the minister, is just like other people; you are not different from other people, old man!"

"Go on," said Walter; "you are in excellent form; you have not quite finished yet; you want to add something else, and I know

what will follow." He was on the point of explosion.

"Quite so, if I want to have my whole say, I must add this; the reason you acted in this way, my man, is that Harders is a rich man. Had he been a poor man, it would not have entered your thoughts to stand in awe of him; you are no better than your whole parish, you also serve Mammon!"

"Stop!" Walter cried, and he jumped up from his chair. "I cannot listen to you any longer. You are putting me on the rack and you like to see me there; you turn on the screws, and you laugh to yourself as you see the pain on my distorted face! The deuce!" — and here he stopped a moment, for he had a feeling as if he, the minister, had no right to use such strong language any more, — "I am no better than my fathers! Oh, that stupid, miserable money! When shall I ever be a free man, who has the same sentiments towards a rich man as towards a poor man? I am a miserable fellow! You are right; say anything you like to me!"

He paced the room excitedly, and almost shrieked:

"Do you know what I did? I sat down with Harders in his room and I talked about



his fine room and about his fine house, full of praise! And I walked outside with him on his farm, and I talked about his farm and about the splendour of his farm, and I praised it all. And all the time he had a look on his face as if he wished to say, 'I know all about that. So many people have told me the same thing.' And I talked about the high offices which he held in the Town council, in the polder, and as a churchwarden; and all the time he had a look on his face which meant: 'I suppose the minister has never had much to do with high offices or riches. I suppose the minister has no relations who hold good posts or are rich!' Ye devils! I stood before the altar of Mammon all morning; and as a very small person brought him offerings; and Mammon, that is Harders, looked down upon me all the time with a Sphinx-like face, so that even now I do not know if I pleased him or not. And when I came home I was annoyed about my own stupidity, and I was excited, furious, almost mad. For I feel now that I have been blinded by the same thing that blinds other people, I who, when we were at the University, said, 'When I am a minister, all people shall be equal to me, and I shall take very good care that I am not influenced

by what humiliates so many people, the slavish adoration of gold! Great heavens! How could I be like this?... But wait, the day will come that Harders shall know that I do not care about his greatness or about his gold! If only I meet him again, then I shall do what no other in the parish has dared to do! I shall show more respect to his labourer than to him, and I shall humble him before his servants! And the whole village shall know that in my parish money does not come in the first place, and that there shall be no princes among a people who are all equal!"

And as Walter said this, he kicked against the chairs and tables, as if he were trying to destroy Mammon's altar in his parish.

"And Harders," Van Geuns said coolly, "and Harders, I suppose, did not say a single stupid thing during your conversation? I have no doubt all the nonsense came from you?"

This was too much for Walter. His cup was filled to the brim now; he knew it, and had confessed it to himself. Harders had done nothing which had given him the right to say that the man was proud, or conceited, or selfrighteous, or anything else.

He pushed open the garden door and

walked out into his garden to cool down under his apple and pear trees, which were laden with unripe fruit, but whose branches before long would be bent with the weight of golden apples and pears.

But another thing would come about before long; namely, that Walter would belong to the people who honoured Harders with a respect which no one seemed to be able to withhold from him, and which his father and grandfather had also experienced in the parish of Eastloorn.

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On the other side of the river, to the south of the village, lived Jade, one of Harders' men.

His house stood among huge pieces of marshy land that was peat bog. All that peat bog belonged to Harders.

The other people in Eastloorn, especially those living in the north and the east part of the village, where the country was higher, also possessed some peat soil; but that was only peat moor.

"Of course," Walter had grumbled, "all the people in these parts have peat-moor, Harders alone possesses peat-bog! You see, Van Geuns, you, being a townsman, cannot

understand it; the peat-moor is simply dug out in large pieces with a spade, and although it is a useful possession, it is not worth very much. But the peat bog is much deeper down, and must be dug out from under the water; and then it is laid out to dry on the fields and is cut into small pieces. That turf is worth far more than that cut from the peat-moor. It is a curious thing that Harders, who has so much as it is, should also have that advantage above the others. Have you ever seen that great marsh on the other side of the river?"

"You need not explain all that to me," Van Geuns answered, "did the masters at school not teach me that twenty years ago? It is amusing to see how much you like airing your newly acquired wisdom!"

In the midst of Harders' peat bog lived Jade. His house was situated near a wide canal, which ran into the river Vecht about a mile further on. The communication with the river was by means of a lock.

The whole moorland was crossed with wide or narrow canals and ditches, and many scows were to be seen on them, on which the men stood with long sticks, dragging the peat and throwing it into the scow. Looking across the moorland one could see neither the scows nor

the men, only here and there the long sticks; occasionally one could hear the sticks splashing into the water, and the sloppy sound of the peat as it was thrown on to the other peat in the scow.

Godeke, Jade's wife, sat in front of the house.

"He could not be here yet," she thought; "it cannot be so very late yet." She looked up at the sun. Several hours would elapse before the sun would be low in the heavens and set, leaving a red glow in the distant pool.

"But the children might be here; the school must be out long ago. I suppose they have gone off with the other boys. What is it those children do when they go into the woods?"

She took one potato after another from her lap and peeled them hastily, for there was much to be done. They fell from her hard, rough fingers into the bucket which stood beside her on the ground. She did her work cheerfully, for hunger and care were not known in that home.

"Harders is a good man;" were her thoughts; "what a long time my husband has been in his service! From the very day that Jade and I came from Southloorn to look for work Harders has given us a good wage; he is good to his



people; and we live on those wages with our children, and have plenty of food to eat and warm clothes, and the house also is good." And, almost without knowing it, she prayed the prayer of the labourer for the master who is kind.

Harders' men did not all bless him, for not all of them were good; but those among them who were, asked a blessing for him in their prayers. That was an old custom in Eastloorn.

She looked up as she heard the splashing of a boat, which was pushed along by means of a stick.

Harders himself stood erect in the boat; he had come to watch his men. At regular intervals the stick was raised above the water, and at regular intervals it was pushed down to the bottom, and the boat came nearer and nearer, passed her house and went on.

A "How do you do?" came from both sides, and the man disappeared out of sight at the turning of the canal, where his men were dragging the peat.

"Why did he not stop a moment?" Godeke thought; "he always rests here and comes in. He seems to be in a great hurry to-day."

But she did not think of it any more. She got up and went to the well behind the house,

where she washed the potatoes before putting them on the fire.

Then she went in and worked hard for an hour or so, for there are many things to do in a large family. That hour soon passed.

All of a sudden she looked up on hearing the front door opened. She was startled, because the hour was unusual. "Jade, you here?" she cried; "how is that? Why have you stopped work so soon?"

"I have stopped for always!" was the man's answer, and he seemed stunned, not knowing whether to rage or to weep, like a child.

The woman stopped lighting the fire and stood quite still with a bundle of sticks in her hand, with staring eyes as one who cannot think.

"Yes, stand there and stare at me," Jade said, and threw himself on a chair. "We can go away to-morrow, for ever away from this house, with the children and with all we possess! Harders has said it!"

"Sent away? Sent away? You, Jade, you? What have you done?"

And, for the very first time since her marriage, a suspicion was roused in the woman against the man of whom she had never thought ill in her life. It could not possibly

enter into the head of any good man or woman in Eastloorn that Harders would have done wrong or acted in an unjust way.

"I have stolen, wife, stolen! Harders has said it himself; I have stolen a whole scow of turf; have you understood it? Stolen! I!" He almost choked over the words.

"Why do you not ask me about it?" Jade shrieked; "do you not want to know the rest? Speak then, and ask me about it, I will tell you all!"

But no question was framed by her lips; there was no questioning look in those eyes or on the woman's face. If it were possible for a corpse to stand straight up, with wide, staring eyes in which death could be seen, Godeke might have been that corpse.

"It happened in this way, woman! I will tell you how it happened! Harders told me how it was, himself!" And Jade shrieked out the story. "The day before yesterday we took six scows of turf to town; the three of us, I, Hutten and Ekkel. You know the other two; they drink, and do not belong to our village. And in the evening we arrived in town and brought the scows to the dealer's house. Then we went to sleep; we were going to unload them the next day. But in the morning there were

only five scows! Hutten and Ekken would not unload, but went to Harders and told him about it, and invented the rest, and now Harders says that I took that scow in the night, and took it away, took it away, no one knows where to! I only know where that scow is, I only know! Harders has said so!"

Jade shrieked and shrieked, with foaming mouth and wild eyes.

Neither the man nor the woman had noticed the children, who had come stealing in. But the frightened children clung to their mother with a questioning look in their eyes, as if they were asking: "Is that father?"

"Away, children, away, children!" Jade cried, when he noticed them. "You must all go away! All of you, and mother and I also. Harders has said so! Your father is a thief!"

At last the woman, who had been as dead, came to life again. She had stood there with death in her soul, and when her lips moved slowly, she gasped:

"If Harders has said it, it must be so! Oh, Jade, Jade! That I never thought! Jade! You!"

As long as could be remembered in East-loorn no one bearing the name of Harders had ever lied or done an injustice, so no

good person in Eastloorn could possibly believe that a member of that family could do anything that was not just or right. Even a woman who since the day of her marriage had never thought ill of her husband believed in his guilt sooner than she would believe that Harders could do anything which was not perfectly justifiable in the eyes of every right-minded person in Eastloorn.

The next day there was an empty house at the canal in the moorland. The door had been left open. Why should it be shut? There was no table in the room, and no chair, and no bed. The flies flew in and out, and out and in.

No one came near the house for some time, except an occasional labourer who wanted a drink of pure water from the well on his way to work.

And every one still called it: Jade's house.

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"Have you heard about it?" Walter asked Van Geuns, "have you heard what Harders has done now?"

"Yes, I have heard it," Van Geuns answered, "and I have seen it too! While you were out this morning they came past this house,



poor souls! It was a sad procession. That man Jade had harnessed himself with a rope to a hand-cart; his wife pushed and steered the cart; several children followed her, and some others were sitting on the cart. I suppose those were all their worldly possessions which were on the cart, a bed, a table, a few chairs, and some rubbish on the top. And so they passed by. Your housekeeper told me they were going back to Southloorn, where they used to live before Harders gave the man work. They could not suffer the humiliation of remaining here among all the villagers who had known them to be respectable people for so long. It was a sad procession!"

"I saw them at the other end of the village. No one in the whole village spoke to the people. They avoided Jade, all of them. He went away in silence. No man came out of his house to shake hands with him, and to say: 'Jade, I believe in your innocence!' No woman crossed the road to say to the wife: 'Godeke, here is some bread, take that for your children!' The fear of that old name of Harders is so deep-rooted that no one dared to accuse him of being rash. It is a shame! When that one man condemns any one, the whole village sends him to Coventry. It is

a shame! But I spoke to him, I stopped him at the brigde. And I said: Jade, shake hands with me! The poor wretch did not dare to take my hand, but said: 'Let me pass, sir, I am a thief; Harders has said so!' Do you know that even his wife believes he did it? It is a terrible thing that the woman believes in the infallibility of that farmer more than in her husband's honesty."

"You had better not judge too hastily either, my man!" Van Geuns answered. "You are prejudiced against that farmer for reasons we know of; but if you will not be sensible, which I have always imagined you to be, just postpone your judgment! Surely he would not dismiss a labourer for nothing, a labourer who has served him all these years!"

"No, no, I know what I shall do. Before the evening comes I shall have been to Harders, and he shall hear from my mouth what every one thinks, and no one dares to say! To think that such a man is honoured in that manner! I cannot understand how he deserves it! It is the power of money which has given him this great influence, and nothing else!"

"I do not know," Van Geuns objected, "but, if it were that only, it would be a sad blot against your parishioners, whom you have

always held so high! I do not know, but there must be something else about that Harders which makes all the people have such faith in him! Perhaps we shall hear one day what has made him and his forefathers so great in the eyes of all the people. And perhaps we shall also join in giving him the respect which he seems to get from every one else!"

Unwittingly, Van Geuns was a prophet in this case, for, although it was late autumn before it happened, the day came; and that day brought a greater surprise to Walter than he had ever known before.

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It was one evening when Walter was sitting quietly in his room.

His sitting-room was his study and his study was his sitting-room. Being a bachelor, he made no difference between the two. He noticed that all the ministers of the district whom he knew made a very great difference between their study and their sitting-room. But they were all married, and in that case the wife wished it.

And so he sat among his books that evening, calmly and quietly among his books, which

lay scattered about him in heaps, on the table, on the chairs, on the couch, and all over, where there was room for them.

He did not think of the possibility that any one could come and call on him at that hour.

"No one comes to see me in the evening," he had once said to Van Geuns; "the farmers rarely call on me. If I were married it might be different, but I am a bachelor, and who would think of coming to have a chat here?"

And one day he said to his housekeeper: "When we have finished dinner you can lock the door for the night, for no one ever comes so late!" His colleagues in the towns envied him when he told them about it.

But on this evening there was a ring at the bell, and with some surprise he saw a man standing at the door, one whom he had expected to see least of all.

"Harders!" he exclaimed.

The man sat down in a chair opposite him. In Walter's eyes this man was a lion whom he had not been able to tame.

Without knowing it, his admiration once more got the better of him. The man was half a head taller than he. A big, broad head

rested on his shoulders, shoulders which could have carried an ox. And that head was not ugly. On the contrary, his eyes were open and full of courage, with a clear, calm look. His lips were finely cut and looked kind. His forehead was high, although it did not look it, because of the hair which fell over it. Instinctively Walter's admiration got the better of him, although he fought against that admiration.

"Sir," — it was Harders who spoke first, and it irritated Walter, because he had not known how to begin himself, — "Sir, I have not seen you since you were with me six weeks ago. Then you thought it necessary to come and scold me about what I had done to Jade."

"I know that quite well," Walter answered, "and I saw no reason to come and see you again. We did not part in a very friendly, manner that time! And after that conversation you surely could not expect that we should pretend that nothing had happened, and engage in small talk."

"I have dreaded coming to you. But I must do what is right. And, although this step cost me much, because it is a right one I had to take it. I have something to say to you, sir! I have accused Jade wrongly!"



For a short moment a look of triumph came into Walter's eyes. He felt himself to be greater than Harders, but he was very careful not to show it. He was silent and so gave Harders time to continue. He was prepared to hear the confession of a proud man.

And slowly, very slowly, as if it were a very difficult task, the farmer told the story of what he had discovered later on. His decision had been influenced by facts which pleaded against Jade, facts and circumstances which had been related to him. Also, the man Jade had had something secretive about him, although he had been in his service for so many years; he had never made a friend of his master, which would have been quite easy, during all those years. Harders was quite willing to admit that this might have been just a trait in Jade's character. Hutten and Ekkel had been the thieves; they had taken the scow, full of turf, to a neighbouring public-house, where they were in the habit of drinking their beer and their gin, and with the turf they had settled a heavy bill. It had all leaked out; he himself had got it out of the men; no policeman or mayor had been mixed up in the matter. He had accused Jade innocently, and the wrong weighed heavily on him.

"That is not like a man bearing the name of Harders!" Walter said, with a touch of irony which he could not hide.

"You are right, sir," Harders said, and a dark red covered the face which had not often had to blush for shame before. "But you must not accuse my family, sir, of things which I alone am to be blamed for!"

Walter bit his lips, but continued: "Quite right, — but it is not like a man who has the name of being good and just and righteous, and I do not know what else!"

"You are right, sir," was again the answer, but, although it was said humbly, it was clear that it was difficult for the man to give in.

"And it is a thing which is very difficult to put right, almost unforgivable! Have you pictured to yourself how that man must have suffered for weeks and weeks, a man whose honest, untainted name you have dragged through the mire? Have you thought of the wife, whose love for her husband you have broken?"

"You are right, sir," he said once more, but Walter saw that he almost choked over his words, as if they were words of fire.

Walter hesitated; he was afraid to say any more, for he saw that the man was giving himself a worse punishment than he could do.

He could scarcely imagine that the man sitting opposite him was really Harders.

"You may go on, sir, and say anything you like to me. I have deserved it, and I will listen!" And he waited for the rest of the minister's speech.

But Walter was upset. He did not understand the man; he did not know him. That was not Harders; Harders as he had always pictured him.

"I thought that the minister must be the first person to hear about it. When you reproved me, six weeks ago, I would not listen to you; but I feel that now I must tell you how much I really deserved your reproof, and how just you were in scolding me. That is what I had to put right with you."

"Come, come," Walter said, in a gentler voice, "let that be!" He felt that this humiliation was very painful to the man, and to give a turn to the conversation he enquired: "But what do you think of doing, in order to put things right with Jade?"

"I do not intend to tell you that, sir," he answered: and Walter knew it was not pride which made him say it. "But everything shall be put right with him also."

And with these words the tall man rose to go,

"No, I cannot stay any longer," he said, when Walter motioned to him to stay; "how could I talk to you about other things; I cannot think about anything else."

And when the man was outside, a minister stood in his study ashamed; he scarcely knew himself what had brought about this sense of shame.

He still tried to fight against that feeling of admiration, which the man had roused in him, but it was a weak fight, as of one who almost surrenders.

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When on the next day — it was a Sunday — the people of the Reformed Church came out of God's house, Harders was among the first to be outside on the Square.

"Do not go away," he called out to the people; "I have something to say to you!" He stood by the door of the church, and kept all the others from going away too.

The men and women, full of curiosity, stood still, and they gathered round him in great numbers, and it was a strange sight that they saw.

"Men and women!" he cried in a loud voice, and they could all see him, for he was a

full head taller than most of them, — “I stand here in front of you to tell you that I have wrongly accused Jade, my servant, of theft! I have taken away his honour, and I must give him back that honour, here, openly, and where all of you can hear it!”

He stopped, as if he were almost choked by his words, but continued with an effort:

“I implore each one of you who has thought ill of Jade to change your mind, and to give him the respect which is due to an honest man. Let the disgrace be upon me! I declare solemnly that I have become unworthy of the name of my forefathers by an injustice such as has never been committed before in my family! I shall not wonder if none of you respects me any longer; I shall understand if you shun and avoid me! What is right must be done!”

The people had no time to think. It was all too sudden. They stood silent and still, as if they had not understood his words.

And only when Harders was gone, and was walking up the road which led towards his house, a solitary figure, despised, as he imagined, by the whole village, only then they began to talk quietly and softly, and very



soon they parted, each one going to his own house.

Wiegen, alone, followed him, Wiegen, the Dreamer. The villagers watched him walking beside Harders, talking cheerfully, until they parted at the end of the village.

And Sander, the deacon, one of a small group of men who were walking together, said:

"I consider that Harders has honoured our Church by his confession of guilt!" And all the other men of the Reformed Church were of the same opinion.

And when the elders of the Dissenting Church, who had already heard the news, were walking home, Schepers remarked: "I consider it a privilege for the Reformed Church that they number such men, who can do what is right, even if this doing right means humiliation!"

Walter began to understand now how it was possible that for many years this man had been more respected in his village than any other man.

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A thing happened on the following Monday which filled all the inhabitants of Eastloorn with a great pride; they had not felt so proud

for many a day, and it was talked about for months and years after.

It was quite early still. But Harders was seen, sitting in a cart driving from "Great Bule" towards the village. It was the big cart which was used to carry heavy loads, the one without a tilt, so that every one could see that the rich farmer was going to fetch something or other. In this manner Harders drove towards the village and right through it.

Very soon all the villagers were talking about it.

Two women, Fenne and Snippe, who received parochial relief, lived in the first cottages as you entered the village. These two old women always had something to say to one another, and they were generally more out of doors than inside, for they never entered each other's cottage.

"I wonder what Harders is going to do with the big cart?" Snippe remarked.

"He will be going to town," was the answer, "to get rape-seed cakes for his cattle."

"You know quite well that he never goes to town for that! He has plenty of hay and fodder and never needs to buy any!"

"Then he will be buying meal for his pigs."

"Why do you say that, Fenne? You know

quite well that he has plenty of potatoes in his fields to feed all his pigs!"

"Then he will be getting a cart-load of turf for his fireplace."

"Why do you say that, Fenne? You know as well as I do that his turf-barns are over there on the moorland, near Jade's house! And that is in the other direction!"

"Why do you not say what he is going to do?" the other answered snappily, for Fenne enjoyed teasing her old neighbour, who was ten years older than she, and she liked exciting her curiosity.

"I know quite well where he has gone to with the big cart," Snippe shrieked.

"And I know too!" Fenne said, biting.

Peace was at an end between the two for that day and angrily the old women withdrew each to her own room.

The thing which neither of them had wished to say to the other, but which both had understood, was that Harders had gone to fetch back his servant, if Jade were willing to come.

And the whole village knew it.

And they acted nobly, those people. No one came to the door out of curiosity. Each one of them felt that it was a painful journey which this man was taking. And if any one

happened to be out on the street he went into the house quickly, so that he might save Harders the humiliation of being seen. The street was empty. And Harders knew why the street was empty. He drove through the deserted village and across the bridge. He did not have to greet any one. And the love which he had always felt for his people grew.

Only one person came outside; Mrs. Goestel, the well-to-do widow of a baker, a woman of his own rank, who had known his father. She crossed the street to speak to him: "Shake hands with me, son of old Harders!" she said; "you are doing right. May God bless you!" And that was all she said.

When he arrived in Southloorn he did not know where to find Jade, and he was forced to enquire where he lived. It was very painful, but he questioned bravely, until he learned where to find him.

When he stopped his horse in front of the house he said to himself: "Rest in peace, father! I shall do what is right; I shall not be ashamed!" And he went in.

Jade never told any one what Harders said to him in that room. And Godeke never told any one, either.

"No one must ever ask Jade about it,"

Sander said afterwards to the people, who talked about it. "Do you think that a confession of guilt is public property?"

But after Harders had spoken for some time, the neighbours saw him carrying out a bed on his head and loading it on to the cart; and they saw that he carried out chairs and a table, and that he helped Jade to put it all on to the cart. And they saw that he helped Godeke up on to the cart, and he placed her in front on the seat next to Jade. There was only room for two on the seat.

"But you should sit here," Godeke had said; "and Jade, you must walk!"

But the farmer answered: "No, stay where you are!"

And he had taken the reins and walked beside the cart, as if he felt that only by walking he could atone for the injuries done to these people and their children.

He walked beside the cart all the long way from Southloorn to Eastloorn. The man and woman on the cart felt ashamed; but they could not prevent it. Whenever any one passed they wanted to get down, but Harders would not allow it.

They also saw Mr. Senserff, the minister,



coming along the road towards them. And again Jade and Godeke tried to get down, but Harders would not allow it. But the minister suddenly turned into a side path on the moor, where Schepers' sheep were grazing, and they saw Senserff talking to Soer, the shepherd lad. He stood with his back turned to the road and pretended not to see them. Harders felt a great love for the minister of the Dissenting Church.

And, even when they approached the village and had to cross the bridge, Harders walked beside the cart as if he were the servant of the man he was driving. And Jade and Godeke wished he had taken the tilt-cart, they sat so high up, in full view of all who went by. They passed the school, and the church, and the vicarage, and rows of houses, and Harders walked beside the cart, holding the reins in his hand.

When they had passed the last cottage, and had turned into the road which led to the moorland, the two old women emerged from their respective rooms.

"I knew quite well that Harders had gone to fetch Lis servant!" Snippe snapped.

"Just as if I did not know it too!" Fenne answered, with an angry laugh.

"Why did you not say so then?"

"I was afraid you would go and stand staring at your door, with your mouth wide open. It was not a sight to look at!"

And Snippe went inside, furious; — that day the two old women did not speak another word to each other. It was always a bad day for the two when they were not on speaking terms. For they both preferred a quarrel with words to friendship in silence.

But, as the cart disappeared in the distance, it was followed by the admiration of an entire village, an un-expressed admiration.

It was not customary in Eastloorn to honour a man by following him with palm branches; neither was it the custom to shout his praises on the streets. Theirs was an admiration and respect which lived only in their hearts as silent prayers. The blessing of hundreds hovered about the cart, as it vanished out of sight.

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That winter Eastloorn's mayor died.

Every one was saying that Harders would be elected mayor.

The elders of both Churches came to him one by one, urging him to send in a request to this effect.

And one day the Governor of the province came to the village and called on Harders, the farmer.

Every one presumed that he also considered Harders the right man for the post.

But Harders would not accept. He could never be persuaded. "That is on account of that affair about Jade," the people said: "if only that had not occurred!"

Even Walter considered the man humble, and great in his humility. Walter, who not very long ago looked upon him as being proud and conceited. He could also understand now how a name can be respected for year after year in a village, and what was the secret of that respect.

Another mayor was chosen. But in reality the post was held by the man who had refused it; he was morally the mayor.

"My parish is increasing," Wiegen, the Dreamer, remarked one evening, when he was chatting with the other men on the Square. They had been talking about Harders, and Wiegen said it cheerfully.

#### IV

### THE MINISTER'S WIFE

They had buried her; they were quite sure of that.

But how was it, then, that she was still there? Always there!

When the Dissenting elders came to the vicarage after church, Senserff received them in the same room where his wife had received them before, a room with windows opening out into the garden.

Nothing was changed.

Some flowers were on the table, freshly gathered, as was always the case; that must have been her work.

Her writing-table stood in a corner by the window with some photographs on it, and writing-paper with a pen lying beside it, and a number of other trifles and knick-knacks.

And, quite close to it, her work-basket; a piece of stuff, with a needle and thread stuck

in it, hung halfway out as if she had been busy sewing a moment ago.

And on the walls a hundred and one things that a woman likes; rather too many in the eyes of the elders, who were accustomed to see nothing but a picture and a calendar at home.

Then the elders sat down, and began to talk about a point in the sermon, or about a poor family who must be visited, or about the week's news.

They went on talking, while the housekeeper poured out the coffee, handed it round, and went away again; for Senserff did not allow her to sit in the room; her place was in the kitchen when she was not required.

But as the elders went on talking, it seemed as if they thought: "Mrs. Senserff must be in the other room; she will have something to do, so that she cannot come in to-day."

And sometimes they seemed on the point of asking: "Is Mrs. Senserff quite well, sir?" They had to take very good care not to make that serious mistake.

How could she have been buried? She was still in the vicarage! Only in the other room!

And she was also in the hut of the poor, at their sickbeds.



Do you say she was no longer there? Yet they seemed always to expect her.

One day a message was sent to the vicarage saying that the wife of Sander, the day-labourer, who lived behind the school, was ill. And they all felt quite sure that the minister's wife would call, as she had always done.

Never before had a message been sent in vain to the vicar's wife. And when she came in, the room seemed to be filled with heavenly Beauty and Goodness. The dark room was flooded with light as she walked to the bedside and sat down; she was never in a hurry on such an occasion. "A doctor, or a minister, or a nurse, who is in a hurry, is no good for sick people," she often said. She was full of heavenly patience. She talked in a soft voice; it was not whispering, for there was a gentle melody in her voice. And then she unpacked what she had brought with her; bread for the children, clothes, and wine and a delicacy for the invalide. And long after she had gone a soft, sweet light illuminated the room. No one sorrowed when she left, for she always promised to come back, either the same day or the next. That was formerly.

And, behold! when Sander's wife sent a message to the vicarage, all sorts of things

were brought to her the same afternoon, bread for the children, wine for herself, and a special dish which had been prepared for her.

"Who brought it?" she said to her children. "I was asleep; has the minister's wife been here?" But she collected her thoughts, as some one does who is just awake and remembers that he has said a foolish thing. But if she had said what was on the tip of her tongue it would have been: "Did the minister's wife tell you whether she was coming back this evening? For I should not like to be asleep again when she comes."

All those who were ill felt as if she had newly been to see them and was going to come again quite soon. When she did not come, they supposed that she had no time, and had something to do at home.

She was still there then. She still came to visit the sick in the huts of the poor. How could any one say then that she had been buried?

She was also to be found in the wood.

Do you think that she did not walk in the wood any more?

Edde, the wood-cutter, used to see her sitting there on fine days, leaning against the

trunk of a tree in the sun, with a small child on her lap, letting it bask in the warm sunshine, as if she were coaxing the child to live, — and Edde, the wood-cutter, came past that spot every day.

She had talked to him there, in such a friendly manner! Heavens! how could a grand lady talk to such a humble man as he was? He knew she was of noble birth; her father was a minister too, but her home was the Hague. Had not Schepers said that she was related to a cabinet minister? And she talked to him as if she were the daughter of his next door neighbour.

“What do you think of my child to-day?” she would say. And she lifted up the thin shawl and allowed him to peep underneath. “Do you not think it is looking better? Look at those rosy cheeks!”

And if there had come a voice from heaven, saying: “You must kneel down before that woman, while she shows you her child,” he would have knelt down. What a woman!

She was not there to-day. But it seemed to the wood-cutter that she must have found another part of the wood to sit in.

Where might it be? Perhaps on the other side of the wood, where one could see the distant

towers of Southloorn across the wide moor.

She was still there, then. She was in the wood, only in another part. How could they say she had been buried?

She was also to be found in the church still.

Do you think she did not sit there any more?

She had always sat in a side-pew with a carved canopy, and because that pew was higher than any of the others every one could see her sitting. And the people often looked up that way. Even the elders sometimes cast surreptitious side-glances in that direction. No one could help watching her.

The young girls were not jealous of her beauty; not one of them denied that she had a prettier face than any other girl in church. It was a curious thing that the girls seemed to count her as one of themselves, and never talked about her as of a married woman. Other married women never laughed in church in Eastloorn; they knew how to behave; but the minister's wife very often smiled sweetly at some one of the congregation.

Even those who sat in the back rows looked at her pew; even the naughty boys who had to be kept quiet by the bell-ringer, who was requested by the churchwardens to do this.

The congregation would not have enjoyed the minister's most beautiful sermon half as much had his wife not been in her accustomed seat, as in the days when her child came into the world.

But once again her pew was empty. What was the difference between then and now?

When the people collected together in the Square after church they had to be very careful not to ask: "How is your wife to-day, sir? And how is the little one?"

And when the men came home after church, their wives, if they had not been able to go, sometimes said without thinking: "And was the minister's wife back again? Is she quite better?"

The verger always made the same mistake also, why otherwise did he invariably sweep out her pew before the service and remove every particle of dust?

The people still always looked at that pew. It seemed to them that the minister's wife was in the vicarage; on one of the following Sundays she would surely appear in church again, and then the child would be christened.

She was still to be seen in the village.

When the butcher came home, he asked



his wife: "What has Mrs. Senserff ordered to-day?"

When the schoolmaster saw that a child was not at school, and the others told him that the child was ill, the absent-minded man would say: "I shall tell Mrs. Senserff afterwards; she is sure to have something for the child."

One day, when Jacob, the Jew, who was also a butcher, sat at the window, looking out on to the street, he said to Sara: "I have not seen the minister's wife come past yet." But he only said that once: Jacob was a wise man and he never made a foolish remark twice.

It seemed to all the villagers that she had only gone to visit her father in Guelders, as she had done once before.

How could they say then, that she had been buried?

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And yet they were quite sure that she had been buried. The whole village knew it for a certainty; there was no doubt about it.

It had been in winter.

It had long been expected that she would not live.

But when the announcement was made at every house, even at the farthest one on the moor, — for Senserff had not wished one person to be passed over, — then they were all startled.

A deep mourning had come over the village, as if each one had had a death in his own house. And if one person had set the example and had drawn the curtains and closed the shutters, — all the people in Eastloorn would have done the same: for it was every one's wish to do it. Schepers had said: "It is not my place to set the example, for would it not look as if I considered myself the first in the village?" And when he had not dared, no one had the courage. But every one in Eastloorn was as sad as if he had been sitting behind closed shutters and drawn curtains.

Also the people would have liked to go to the vicarage to say a comforting word to their minister. But no one had the courage. Many a one could have found the right words, which they might have said; not many people living in a town could have improved upon them. And yet they considered it more courteous to stay at home and not to intrude. They were as children who see a funeral pass;

they stop their game in the middle of the street and creep behind a hedge, and peer through the branches to see the procession coming by, while their faces suddenly become grave and reverent. No one would have dared to go to the minister.

But they had all felt that one or more of them must act as their ambassador, and, whenever any two met on the street or anywhere else, they were sure to say: "The elders should go." There was a silent request from the people to the elders to do it. But each of them, when at home, said to his wife and children: "Do you not know then what a difficult task they want to lay on our shoulders?"

The elders agreed that Schepers was the one who should go; and he gave in at last.

When he went to do it, he kept on his workman's clothes; he had purposely not put on his best suit. "That was wise of him," the people said afterwards; "by doing that he avoided the appearance of wanting to be the most important."

When he turned into the road which led to the vicarage, he went past the door, as if he were going further up the village, and when he came back, he went past again as if he bethought himself of a message. The

verger's wife saw him. "Quite right, Schepers," she thought; "quite right, Schepers; I am glad you had not the courage to go in at once, for he who visits the house of grief must feel small."

But at last he went in. In the room where Senserff sat by the fire, deep in thought, he remained standing at the door for a moment, cap in hand. At that moment he represented the respect of a whole population.

And then he took courage. Going up to the man with whom he wanted to speak, he said: "Sir, no one dares to come, and now they have sent me to speak to you; also, I think, I have something to say!"

"I can tell you that Schepers must have spoken well to the minister," Niesink, the bee-farmer, said to his neighbour later on.

"What did he say?" the neighbour asked.

"Well," the bee-farmer answered, "he began to talk quite softly, mumbling as some one does who has lost his speech and cannot articulate. And he looked at the minister so that the minister suddenly felt that he represented the grief of an entire parish and burst into tears. And then the moment came. Schepers put out the other hand, which was free, and took hold of the minister and said:

"Sit down here, on this chair," as if he were the host in that house and the minister his guest. And he spoke to the minister as a father does to his child."

"But, Niesink, what did he say? I suppose he quoted mighty words from the Scriptures."

"No, my man; the comforters who begin to quote from the Scriptures at once are men who find nothing to say from their heart, because they have no real feeling, and that is why they must borrow words from the Holy Scriptures. They must make up for their want of feeling by quoting from the Bible. Do you know what Schepers did? When they were sitting, he began to talk about the minister's wife, without mentioning her death. He went on telling him things that he had come through with her and things that the people in the parish had known of her; all beautiful things. Some of the stories the minister knew, of course; but Schepers did not mind that; and some of the stories the minister did not know; they were new to him. The minister was surprised that his wife had done noble deeds that he did not even know of. Schepers did nothing else, only went on telling his stories. 'Do you think I am a man great enough to place myself above the minister



and to say: "I shall comfort you?" he said to me afterwards. And the afflicted man sat listening to one story after another; they were all beautiful, for everything that Mrs. Senserff did for the people was noble. He listened to Schepers as if he were telling him beautiful stories from a book, and that book was his book. At last the evening fell and they sat there until it was quite dark in the room; the two men had not noticed it. When the maid came in with a light Schepers said: 'No, no, girl, not yet; I will tell you when you can bring it,' just as if he were master in the house. And then, man, in the dark he prayed with his minister, on his knees. He did not say that he did it; but the maid heard it; and since that day the maid does not dare to look at Schepers when she sees him coming. But it was grand, man! I can tell you that. And a great peace came over the minister, a great peace; and the whole parish saw it in the cemetery; you know that as well as I do."

The strange part of it was, that ever since that day Schepers was more humble than ever with the minister. He was as one who has braced himself up to do a thing that he ought not to have done to one who was greater

than he; as one who has done wrong and would never get over the fact. Such was the elder's behaviour in the parish from that day.

Yes, it was quite true; the minister's wife had been buried. How could any one doubt it! And how could they say then that she was still there, always there?

The second one who had come to Senserff, after Schepers, was the minister of the Reformed Church, Walter.

Many eyes had peeped from behind the curtains when the people in the village street had seen him go.

There had been much conversation on this subject the day before. "I am sure your minister will not go," the verger of Senserff's church said to the old widow of the baker of the Reformed Church: "the strife between the two Churches is in the way."

"And I tell you that he will go," she answered. "You do not know our minister; you do not know what is in his heart; it is warmer than many a heart that I know."

And the same discussion took place between all the people who spoke to each other.

And when Walter came out of his house and pulled his front door to and went up the street

towards the other vicarage, many inquisitive faces appeared at the windows behind the curtains; the minister felt it.

And as soon as he was standing on Senserff's doorstep all the faces disappeared from the windows; every one had gone out by the back door to tell each other what every one knew, that Walter had gone to Senserff; the minister felt it.

No one ever heard what took place between these two. Walter did not tell any one, and neither did Senserff.

But every one noticed that after that day Senserff would never allow any man to talk evil of Walter. In former days Senserff himself had often called him Synodus by way of a joke, but that name never again passed his lips.

After that, it was often seen that when the two ministers met each other in the village or outside in the fields, they walked part of the way together, and once they had been seen sitting for an hour in the shade of the big oak tree by the side of the stream.

"I wonder if the Dissenters are at last beginning to know the heart of our minister?" the old widow of the baker said to herself.

And also it was seen that after that many a Dissenter took off his cap to Walter.

So she had been buried. No one could doubt it. How could they say then that she was still there, always there?

And there was yet another proof.

On the outskirts of the village, on the south side, was a wood, a pine wood. And there was the new churchyard of the Dissenting community.

When the separation between the two Churches had become a fact, the Dissenters had thought it necessary to have their own burying-ground.

It was not necessary, of course not. They could bury their dead in the general cemetery quite as well.

But Senserff had objections to that burying ground. He had permitted his men to found a new one. It seemed so cold, the other; a great open space, and in the middle of it the graves; there was not a tree on it, and not a tree anywhere near; nothing but fields, where the cattle grazed, on all four sides. Everything in and about the village was full of poetry; only the dead had to do without poetry!

Senserff was also annoyed about the difference in rank in that churchyard. It was separated into three divisions, one part for

the poor, those who had been kept by the parish during their life-time; another part for the very rich; and a part for those who did not belong to either of those two classes. It all depended upon how much the relations could afford to pay. This was a great advantage to the village-treasury. It annoyed him; must the people even in their graves be divided by what is called money?

And so in those days he had induced his Churchwardens to give the Dissenters a burying-ground of their own.

They had cut down many trees in the wood on the Southside, and they had built a wall round that open space. And there, surrounded by the eternal pine trees, sheltered from the North wind, the dead of his parish might rest. And any one looking at the wood, would not have imagined that there was a churchyard there.

The stipulation had been made that all the graves should be equal and free of cost; the parish had undertaken to bear the cost of the laying out and maintenance.

Since then two children had been buried there. The minister's wife was the third. There where a thick, hundred year old pine bent its heavy branches over the wall, and where



winter and summer the pine-needles sighed, there she was put to rest. A stone cross with her name, and nothing else.

The whole parish had been present; it will be spoken of years hence. Men from Gueldres, and great men from the Hague had been present, but all had been very simple. There had not even been a burial-repast in the vicarage.

So she had been buried. But how could they say then that she was still there, always there?

No one had ever known such a strange thing before. She was not there and she was there; only the one feeling was sometimes stronger than the other; that depended on circumstances. But when sometimes the sensation that she was gone was very real, a great sadness came over the parish, as if the loss could not be repaired even by the presence of both ministers.

There were some who thought that this grief would pass away some day, if in time a new minister's wife should come to the parish.

But those who knew Senserff, as Schepers knew him, said that if this were the only means to lighten the people's grief no one should count on it. Senserff was not the man who

was likely to marry a second time. For it was with him as it was with the whole parish; his wife was always there still, always there, although she had been buried!

And one of those who grieved most was Wiegen, the Dreamer. The one thought which was always in his mind was this: "I have lost the best member of my invisible Church!"

## V

### THE GREAT DROUGHT

The inhabitants of Eastloorn will never cease talking about the great drought which prevailed two years after the Dissension broke out.

The drought started quite early in spring. In the beginning no one took any notice of it, for who could possibly know that it would be a far worse drought than the oldest people in the village could remember?

True, in the month of March the farmers were astonished to find the roads outside the village were much better than they usually were at that time of the year. Also, they had thought it curious that the winter had passed without any snow or rain. But who could know that this was the sign of the great drought which was to come?

When they began to think of ploughing, and fetched the plough out of the barn, they noticed that the blade did not look at all rusty,

and was almost as shining as when they ploughed the land last. Neither was there any mould on the leather of the harness; it did not even require to be wiped.

And another thing, which rarely occurs in spring, was that in ploughing the dust flew up in all directions, so that it made the horses cough. The ploughman came home black with dust; it made the village girls laugh to see his face, to which dust and perspiration had given this colour. Had they known about the great drought they would not have laughed!

Another strange thing was that no birds followed the plough. Other years the gulls, the white gulls, swarmed about the man and his horses; and they snapped up the worms and the larvae which were thrown up by the blade in the furrows. They fought for them, shrieking and flapping with their wings; they forgot to be frightened, and in their hunger came down quite close to the ploughman's feet, so that he could have caught them in his hand. But where were the gulls this year? They were not to be found on a single field. Did the gulls know about the drought already, and was that why they flew to other fields, far away by the sea?

The farmers had not seen them on the

meadows, either; and that was strange, too. The river which intersected the meadows was so low in February that the usual flood had not taken place this year. The meadows had not derived any advantage from it. The owners of the land were disappointed at this, as they were at a loss to know how the grass would be fit for mowing, when it lacked the beneficial effect produced by the annual flood. The ice had disappeared this year without drifting. First it had given way in the middle with great rents, and then had melted entirely. One fine morning there was not a trace of it left as far as the eye could reach down the river.

The Polder Committee had not found it necessary to repair the dykes.

The miller, whose duty it was to clear the meadows of the remaining water, had found that his services were not required this year. His mill had not been in motion for a whole month, and the villagers had seen him perambulating the village daily, with his hands in his pockets, talking to any one who had the patience to listen to him.

Over the whole expanse of the meadows not a bird was to be seen. Such a thing had never been known to happen. The plover had not



put in an appearance, and the village boys did not go out on Sundays in search of eggs, as they had done in former years.

"The cattle," the farmers said subsequently, "knew what was about to take place before we men did." Their belief in the understanding of animals was not a little increased by their indication of restlessness.

And so the drought had begun, quite early in spring.

When April came, the first flowers in the little village gardens were long in coming out. Why were the flowers so slow? Did they also know that the drought was coming?

As a rule, the crocusses in the notary's garden attracted a crowd of admiring farmers' wives on Sundays after church, but this year they were quite small and shrivelled up, so that the women only lingered for a moment at the gate, wondering why the notary had given up his hobby. For many years his crocusses had been larger than those in any other garden in the village. Perhaps it was because his wife had died that winter, and that he had lost his interest in flowers. How could the farmers' wives know about the drought which was coming?

The snowdrops had not flowered at all.

The wild anemones in the wood had not flowered either, and the children had not been able to gather large bunches of them, as they walked to school through the wood coming from the distant farms. They usually gave the flowers to the people of the house where they ate their midday meal. There were no new shoots on the wild rose-trees, and the mayor's gardener, who made a great study of grafting, knew that it would not be possible this year. But the gardener did not know that this was a sign of the coming drought. Who could suppose that the wild rosetree would know such things before the gardener, and was more sensible than he, and did not risk its new shoots, knowing only too well that they would surely die before the end of summer?

The tall ferns, growing on the banks of the ditches, did not awaken from their winter sleep. Last year's brown and crumpled leaves were not replaced by any new and fresh ones. Why did the new ferns not unfold their leaves?

The ferns which grew up against the old trees and in the hollow of the willow did not do well either.

Only the thistle was not influenced by any bad omens. It spread out its prickly leaves

on all the fields. Thistles grew on the meadows as if the farmers had forgotten to weed them the year before. The dyke was covered with them from top to bottom. The servants and children were sent to the fields and meadows in great numbers, but it was of no avail; they pulled them out with long wooden pincers and laid them in great heaps in a corner of the field and burned them, but it was no good. The number of thistles remaining was always greater than those that had been taken away. All the thistle seed of former years seemed to have waited for this summer to come up.

And the animals and plants knew, but the people did not, that this was to be the year of the great drought.

Only when May came, — then one or two people thought such a thing might be possible.

One of these was Sander, the deacon, whose fields lay very high, at the side of the village, where the woods covered the slopes of the hills.

His winter corn was only a few inches above the ground, and the corn told him, when he was walking past early one morning: "I am not going to grow any more this year. Why should I? Everything is going to die in any

case. If you reason at all, you will see that I am right. What would be the good of allowing the ears to shoot up; they would only shrivel without having any corn. Do you imagine it is pleasant to do work for nothing?"

And the farmer had scratched his head thoughtfully, and looked at the corn.

"Certainly," it went on, "just look; it is four o'clock in the morning, and can you find a drop of dew on any of my stalks? I am not even talking about rain; I mean dew. Other years we were wet with dew all night long; it came from the river over there; it enveloped the village and ascended higher and higher until it reached these fields; and then we would say to each other: It is coming, it is coming!" and we swayed to and fro, so that even the smallest blades were covered with white dew. Then it went higher up to the pines; so that the pine-needles were quite heavy with dew, a drop on every needle. And when the hares came we laughed, because we made them wet, so that they could only get dry in the afternoon, when they went to lie in the sand on the hill, in the sun. Have you never seen the hares there? That was our fault, we made them so wet!"

And the farmer stood still and listened

intently; he forgot to walk on; his feet seemed nailed to the ground.

"But tell me," the low corn continued, "tell me, what is the matter with the river? Why does it not send up any mist in the evenings? Why does the dew not come? We are small and cannot see across the village; but is there any dew on the lowlands? Is the corn any higher there? Are the young stalks there also yellow before their time, as we are?"

And the farmer answered.

He did not know that he was answering and talking with his fields.

He told them that it was not much better there, and that the dew did not come there either. He talked aloud as some one does who tells a sad story to others who do not know it yet; and he talked for a long time. He did it without thinking, so that Bins, the labourer, coming down the road, called out to him and asked him to whom he was talking. Bins always laughed when no one else did, and few people liked him.

And the farmer felt ashamed that any one had heard him talking with his corn as if he were talking with a friend; and that any one had seen him standing there, as he had



done for a considerable time, with his feet nailed to the ground.

And there were others too, who began to understand it.

Iken was one of them; his buckwheat fields were situated to the East of the village, on the moorland.

He had waited until there were no more night frosts, for it was not advisable to sow the buckwheat before those were over; one night frost might be sufficient to destroy all. And when that danger was past he had said to his son, Kassens, "We must set fire to the heath, my boy. It is time for the buckwheat."

And then he and the other farmers who cultivated buckwheat had commenced burning the heath, and the east wind had carried clouds of smoke to the village, and it lasted for days, so that the air in the streets and the houses was stifling. But no one in Eastloorn thought of grumbling about the smoke; it was an annual event in the village. They had heard it said that the people far away in Holland, — for the smoke reached even there, — disliked it very much, but they could not understand that. There was a shadow over

all the land, and the sun shone through masses of grey clouds.

And after the burning of the peat-moor, when the soil had cooled down, Iken had started sowing his buckwheat. It was all as in former years.

"Now for some rain, my boy!" he had said to Kassens; "if only the rain comes it will be all right."

But the rain did not come.

One week passed, two weeks, three weeks; not a sign of rain.

There was no change in the field.

And sometimes when he was walking there with his son Kassens, he would stoop and pick up a handful of earth and let the sand run through his fingers, so that he could examine the buckwheat seed by pinching a few grains between his nails.

"The seed is burned, father," Kassens said; "it has had too much sun."

The man did not answer, but he began to understand that which the plants and animals had understood long ago; he looked towards the West and to the South, and gazed at the horizon with piercing eyes, as if he would have liked to command the clouds to appear above the horizon; but there were no clouds.

And there were others who began to understand.

The farmer's wife understood, when she found that there was less milk to churn every morning. When the milkmaid came back from the meadows she noticed that there was always less milk in the pails than the day before. A little later only one pail was required, and the time came that even the one pail was only half filled. The farmer's wife wondered whether it was worth while to churn at all?

The butcher, the village Jew, also understood it. For the farmers offered him all their calves, all of them. He bought far more than he required, and even more than he could sell to other butchers in town who bought the calves from him.

"There is no grass, not even enough for the cattle," he said to his wife, "and now they are having to sell all their calves. They will be poor, Sarah. You must be thrifty too; be thrifty, Sarah!"

"But why should we be thrifty, now that you are earning so much money on account of the cheap cattle?" she enquired.

"Sarah, be thrifty," he answered, without explanation; "you will see when winter comes why we shall want that money."

The notary also understood it when the farmers came again and again, asking him for a loan. This occurred far oftener than in former years.

"That is because they are not doing any business on the market; I heard that at Steenwijk last week there were only three farmers, and that the market-place was as empty as on any ordinary day;" he thought.

"I must consider," his thoughts ran on, "whether I can go on giving them these advances. It will be much worse before we are done, and how can I be certain that I shall get my money back?" It seemed hard when, in talking to the men, he hinted at higher interest; but he never refused them a loan.

The postmaster also began to understand, for there were very few who added to their deposit in the postoffice savings-bank, and there were many who took away their savings. He had calculated exactly how much the small farmers had saved during the past year, and the calculation had made him quite cheerful. But he could also calculate now exactly how much the small farmers had taken away this year, and the knowledge gave him a sad peep into the future.

Every one began to understand it; their eyes were opened.

At first they were very cautious in talking about it; very careful, as people are who have a presentiment but hope that they are mistaken; as people who do not consider it well-bred to complain just in the beginning, for it was only June yet. They were very cautious, as if they thought; "I myself feel uneasy about the rain not coming, but what is the good of frightening another person who is not alarmed yet?"

In the beginning they only hinted. Some one would say: "Do you remember, Vossens, how high the winter corn was last year at this time?" Or, "What a mist there always was in February, and what a lot of dew on the river in May." Or, "I thought the wind was changing to the West yesterday." But no more.

No one complained.

It was a long time before the villagers actually put their thoughts into words. A long time.

It was the minister, Walter, who was the first to say it straight out, on a Sunday after the sermon. The minister had not been born and bred in Eastloorn either; he came from



Gueldres. "Is the rain coming soon, do you think?" he had said bluntly to his churchwardens; and it had frightened them. "This drought has lasted for three months now; what will happen?" The churchwardens were still more alarmed.

But the ice had been broken.

All the people in the village began to talk about it now, for what is the good of hiding one's thoughts when every one else is thinking the same?

Only now did it come out how much cause for anxiety there was. It was much worse than any one had imagined.

"It is the middle of July now," Schepers said one evening on the Square. "It can all come right yet; but the heath is so dry that the sheep cannot find a morsel to eat. I am having them taken to the marsh; there is some green food there, but very little to drink. You know that in former years I could scarcely reach the bottom of the water with my long staff, but now the sheep walk right through the marsh! I have looked after the sheep for fifty years, but I have never known such a thing before!"

And so every one had his own tale to tell. Niesink, the bee-farmer, related how he had

gone to see his servant was attending to the beehives. Of the five hundred hives, there was not one with fresh honey. The bees could not find any flowers; there were none on the linden trees when it was time for them to flower; and the heath was quite black, and would not be purple and red that year.

And other farmers said that their grass was burnt even down by the river; there was not much hay left from the year before; what were they to do when that was finished too? They were feeding the animals with it in the mean time.

The fisherman, who fished where the river was wide, said that he had not caught a roach or a perch for three months; eels had been the last fish he had caught. He did not even go to the mayor's wife any more to tell her; for she knew quite well that there was no more fish to be had.

Heister, the bridge man, related that the boys went under the bridge instead of walking over it. Every one knew that the water was ten feet deep in winter, and in summer, at this time, five feet. A scow loaded with turf could pass easily winter and summer; but now the boys ran about in the almost dry bed, looking for round stones for their slings. He

had asked the mayor for permission to stay at home. What was the good of standing there all day at the bridge for nothing; every one laughed at him. But the mayor had asked him if he knew for certain that he would not be wanted on the next day?

There was a sense of relief in the village when, by general tacit consent, every one might talk about it.

That sense of relief lasted for a few days.

But how could it go on? Everything that could be said had been said.

There were few people in the Square in the evenings.

And then another thing came to disturb the minds of the people: it was fear.

Fear.

It had come at last.

Hope had always up to now kept him at bay; but now Hope had gone, and Fear had come instead.

He had come from the East, across the distant pine trees; nearer and nearer, over the moor and over the fields, and across the bridge: across the street, until he reached the Square

If only he had had a shape, even a phantom

shape, it would have been less awful. But he had no shape.

Fear sat in the air above the heads of the people as a great, invisible bird of prey, who flapped his wings, peering down, and pointing his sharp beak at the village; but if the people looked up, they could not see the bird. And if they looked down again they had a feeling as if the bird were hovering above them still.

And in the evening Fear sat beside the pump in the middle of the Square.

Hitherto the women used to like coming out there in the evening and in the afternoon; they talked and were never in a hurry; but now they were afraid, afraid to come near the pump; he was there! One day, Jane, who was in the service of Wendel, the man who had the deepest well in all the village, had been forced to let the pail down on the iron chain as far as it would go, and, after she had counted thirty, she had pulled the pail up, but there was no water in it. The women did not dare to come near the pump; he was there, the invisible one. No one had seen him, and no one could say what he looked like, or what clothes he was wearing; but he was there; and there were no women and no children

to be found in the Square in the evenings. A pail was lying on the ground; who had left it there?

Fear looked into the houses, through the windows, in the middle of the day; who dared to peep through the curtains and cast his eyes over the street?

He went round by the back way, though the stable door, and sat crouching under the manger; but no servant could tell what shape he had.

He sat in the room by the fire; who had placed a chair for him? The women scarcely dared to rake up the ashes on the hearth or to hang up the kettle.

He walked along the road beside the people, so that they were afraid to carry on a conversation; he listened to everything.

He walked to church with the people, went inside, had his own seat, so that they dared not look up for fear they should catch sight of him.

He wandered about the meadows and in the fields, so that the farmers were afraid to go and see them; he sat in the coppice, so that the wood-cutter turned aside where he had never known fear before. He thought it would be the death of him, if he should see the phantom shape.



He was by the river, in the buckwheat fields and in the pine-woods. Fear was everywhere.

And this invisible being made the people silent, so that they went about with bent heads, almost shunning each other. And if they happened to look at each other, they were still more alarmed, for they saw Fear in each other's eyes. There was Fear in every one's eyes.

There was also the dread of fire.

The east wind and the sun had made the roofs of the houses so dry that the moss and the moly had withered; such a thing had never been seen before.

The straw on the roofs was so brittle that it broke at the slightest touch.

The smallest act of imprudence might be the cause of fire, and if one house should catch fire there was little chance of the others being saved. There would be no question of extinguishing the fire if it broke out, for there was no water, and there would not be much left of the village. The mayor had given orders for the people to have iron hooks in readiness, so that, if a house should catch fire, it could at least be pulled down before the house next door was in flames.

There had been a small fire in the landowner's pinewoods; no one ever heard how it came about: but it was touch and go that the whole wood was not burned down.

The dread of fire made the farmer run after his wife when she went to the outhouse for sticks for the hearth, and made him follow her when she went back to the room to lay the fire for cooking the dinner.

The dread of fire made the farmer furious when he saw one of his servants walking about the farm with a burning pipe in his mouth; it was as much as his place was worth.

There was also the dread of poverty.

It was only July, but the fear of poverty, which usually only came towards winter, was there already.

When the deacons met they saw quite clearly how matters would stand in winter, and so they took steps to economise as much as possible. But how could they economise when already there was so much poverty?

Kieft, a man who had never yet received parochial relief had come to the meeting of the deacons and had stood by the door, cap in hand, until the deacons told him to come nearer; and then he had stood with his eyes

fixed on the ground, as one who is about to commit a crime, and the deacons had told him it was not necessary to say anything, for they knew all about it. He did not need to feel ashamed either, for who could say that the deacons themselves would not be in the same predicament that year? That had comforted Kieft and it seemed as if a weight of shame had been lifted from him by the kindness of these men.

But that was only the beginning of the poverty.

No one else had come after Kieft; but the deacons understood that they must go uninvited to some houses and give, for who else would bear the humiliation, as Kieft had done? So the deacons gave away when they should have been economising.

They were encouraged to do this by the Jew. "What made him interfere?" they wondered. "Go on giving," he had said: "go on giving; when the cash-box is empty there will surely be some more money;" and, in saying this, he had smiled so knowingly that the brethren saw through him. For the Jew had come out well in a former time of want. He had taken the trouble to send them a gift via Amsterdam, so that it might appear to

be sent by a stranger. They had never dared to tell him that they guessed him to be the anonymous donor, for it might have looked as if they were ill-bred enough to wish to sound him; but they guessed it was he!

"Save, save," all the men said to their wives in those days. And a sign of their thrift was that very few men ever entered the public house; it was seen in the simple fare, even more simple than it used to be; they tried to save in order to avoid the toll-duty, by walking to market; and by economising in a thousand other little things, devised by the dread of poverty.

And in their fear the people talked to each other when they walked home from church; they talked about the sermon only in connection with the coming distress. If there had been an allusion to it in the sermon, it was quoted and discussed on the walk home; but they went about and talked as people walking in their sleep.

When three or four people met at the bridge they would put their heads together, but in vain; four people were no wiser than one alone.

Then a suggestion was made to hold a day of prayer.

Who had been the first to think of it? No one knew.

They had discussed it on the Square. They had talked about it in Sieds' public house; they had talked about it in the parish council before the meeting commenced.

Who could say who was the first to suggest it? But one day something occurred which filled the members of the Reformed Church with a great respect for their minister. They had seen Walter come out of his house and go straight to Senserff's vicarage; they saw him ring the bell and go in. And when they saw him come out again, they would have liked to know what he had spoken about. But on the next Sunday the whole community knew, for it was announced from both pulpits, with consent of the respective churchwardens, that on the following Wednesday a day of prayer would be held by all the people, and that there would be a service in each church.

"All honour is due to our minister for being the first to go to the other one," the members of the Reformed Church said, and the Dissenters regretted a little that their minister had not been the one to take that step.



And so the day of prayer came about, and never before, in the memory of the oldest inhabitants of Eastloorn, had a day of prayer been held in midsummer.

The Wednesday came.

The heat was even greater than it had been before. There was an east wind, a gentle east wind. The people did not know how it was that the sun and the east wind together did not set fire to the houses and woods. It would not have surprised them at all if a sudden swarm of locusts had come down from the heavens, a swarm such as they had read of in the Bible. In their imagination they were in the land of Canaan all day long, on this day of prayer.

They were all dressed in their best clothes, the men, the women, and the children. Any one who did not know would have thought it was the celebration of some festival.

They came from far and near, some people from a distance of two or three hours; they came from the uttermost parts of the community, some of them living in huts in the wood, and others on the moor; yet they came, and after their isolation it seemed to these people as if they were having a peep into the great world that day.

People who lived on the other side of the marshland came, and they could now come straight across, and walk through an almost dry river.

The numbers of church-goers increased steadily, and formed a thick crowd. The village street was full of people when the villagers themselves also came out. Who had ever before seen the village so crowded?

No one seemed to have stayed at home. Hitherto one man was always left behind to guard the farm, but there was no one who deemed it necessary to take this precaution now.

The mass of people filed into the two churches; there was not enough room in either, so that some of them had to stand outside on the Square.

And, when the service began, a deep silence came over the congregations; even those standing outside were attentive; it seemed to them as if the church walls had expanded so that they also were inside.

As the invocation was offered everything was so quiet that the people could hear the sighing of the east wind in the branches and among the shrivelled-up leaves; they could hear the distant barking of a lonely dog on one of the farms, and, far away, the rattling wheels

of the mail-cart which had passed before church-time.

But when the singing began: — it was an elegy, a penitential hymn to the Lord, — then it was as if the pent-up feelings of hundreds broke out. Now they might lament, these people who considered it ill-bred ever to complain; now they might cry out, these people who considered it ill-bred to cry out. And it sounded loudly; they raised their voices as much as they could, so that, if possible, the sound might penetrate to God's ears, God who sat there on His throne, so high up in the Heavens. It was surprising that the roof did not come off with that singing! that the walls were not shattered as the walls of Jericho!

In the pause between the verses one could hear the ear-splitting singing of the other church, so that when the next verse was begun the shouting became even louder, as if to outvie the other congregation.

That evening, the fisherman's wife, who had stayed at home because she was ill, told her husband that she had been able to hear the singing; and she lived right outside of the village, by the river, there where the river is widest!

When the people were relieved by lamenting to their heart's content, now that it was permitted, they settled for the prayer and to listen to what the preachers had to say for themselves on that day.

And that day all that the ministers said was thought right. Even those who, at other times, always thought it necessary to make some remark, were satisfied now. The general opinion was that never in any church in the country had there been such sermons. Penalty was the key-note of both sermons. Penalty! For the drought was surely a punishment for the sins of the community; for the sins committed openly, and for the sins which had been kept secret. And it was thought quite right that the two ministers spoke in this manner. Every one agreed with them. And if they had wished to put it even more strongly they were quite at liberty! Each person was inclined that day to magnify his own sins!

And when, finally, after the sermon the last prayer was said, then all the anguish, the fear, the longing and everything the people had felt during those long months was expressed in such a deep, silent joining in the minister's words, that nothing at all was heard in the

church save his voice, and a dog's barking on the distant farm.

Not only the preachers wiped their hot faces after the service; every one came out of church bathed in perspiration.

The sun stood high in the heavens. The worshippers walked homewards, dressed in their thick Sunday clothes, on the hot, dusty, shadeless roads.

No one in Eastloorn will ever forget that going to church.

Neither will they forget that which happened in the afternoon!

When the last man had reached home, even those who lived two or three hours away — a miracle seemed to happen — their prayer for rain was about to be heard!

There was no more east wind; it had gone down. And they were almost certain that they could feel a very faint breath of air, which came from the south. It was not wind; just a breath, soft and gentle, scarcely noticeable. They could see a faint movement in the leaves of the white poplar. How could that....

But suddenly something else happened.... there, in the sky, in the West, there was a cloud, a cloud of the size of a man's hand.... Could God so soon....



Only unbelieving eyes looked up at the sky. The unbelief at the possible answering of their supplication was greater than their faith when praying in their distress.

But the cloud came near. There was another, white, white and gleaming. The cloud spread, getting bigger and bigger . . . Heavens! was the rain coming?

One big cloud was covering the sun. A dark shadow rested upon the fields. The sun pierced through it, however; but another cloud came drifting over the sun, and this one remained there; the shadow which rested on the fields became darker and spread out. Rain, rain was coming!

And more clouds came and yet more, from the West, heavier, darker, blacker clouds.

The wind also arose and it was a west wind! The heavens were troubled with gusts of wind and black clouds! The dry straw was blown from the thatched roofs. The dry branches could not withstand the sweeping of the trees. The cattle in the meadows turned their backs to the wind.

Here, then, was the answering of the prayer! The Sunday clothes were taken off. The rain-barrels were carefully inspected.

And not one of the entire population

remained indoors; all stood outside, with astonished and joyful faces, waiting, waiting, for the miracle, God's miracle!

For one hour they waited, one hour; two hours. But then!...

There in the western sky, whence the clouds had drifted, one could discern, low on the horizon, a streak of light, white and clear, untarnished with any black or grey, a cloudless streak of light. And the streak widened and became a clear path of light under the dark vault of thunder-clouds. And the streak of light widened until it reached the sun; the sun, which had been hidden a moment before, once more sent forth his scorching rays, and appeared from under the clouds, red and glowing and terrible! It was as if a great fire broke out behind the clouds; flames of sunshine leaped at the clouds, and pierced holes through them; the clouds gave way; they fled. The patch of light in the sky spread and the sun shot flaming arrows at the drifting clouds. Within half an hour the sky was again blue and gold from one end to another.

The people thought they had beheld a vision; had there really been clouds in the sky?

They put their hands up to feel the wind...

the wind came from the east. Had there been a west wind at all?

They rubbed their eyes and looked about them in all directions, as if they had been deceived.

They did not remember putting on their everyday clothes. Who had placed the tanks there to catch the rain?

And how was it that the dry leaves were scattered about the ground, and why were there holes in the thatched roofs? Had a dream passed over the village, a dream of grey and black clouds, a dream of those who thirsted for water, and, lo, there was no water?

There was no one who could interpret the vision, if it had been a vision. And there was no one who ventured to talk about the dream. The husband avoided his wife's questioning glances, and the children dared not look at their mother.

A deep silence brooded over the village, and the entire population bent their heads under the weight of — God's anger, of which the ministers had spoken in the morning.

The thought of God's anger was the only thing they remembered about that day of prayer. God's anger hovered over the village,

from east to west, from north to south. God's anger rested on Eastloorn for many days and weeks yet.

The two ministers pointed out in vain that they had not meant this in their sermons; they had spoken about sin in general, not about any special sin, committed in the parish. The people believed quite firmly that their own particular sins had invoked God's anger, and they were convinced that their ministers only tried to dissuade them because they pitied them in their plight. They were quite, quite sure of it: this was God's anger.

For what had taken place in the evening of the day of prayer, when the sun shone forth from beneath the clouds? Not the sun, but the archangel Gabriel had appeared in the Western heavens; they had seen a great light; he had swung his flaming sword through the clouds. Those were not tongues of sunfire which had leapt up against the clouds, but sparks from Gabriel's sword as he drove away the clouds in the name of God. Could any one yet doubt that God's anger had come over Eastloorn?

This thought brought about a weight of depression, such as they had not felt before.

God's anger was quite a different matter

from the feelings of fear, which they had experienced before. For in this case the consciousness of their own guilt prevailed, for sins which they had committed and sins which they had not committed. They blamed themselves for everything. And above all they felt ashamed.

It was customary in most families to read a portion of the Bible after the midday meal, and the father of the family in those days turned to the "Prophets" by preference, and he would read to his wife and children the judgments which are written there. And after he had finished reading, he was afraid to pray. For was it possible for a sinner to pray?

When Ilting, the bell-ringer, started his duties at six o'clock on Sunday mornings, as if he wished to proclaim unto all people that the Sabbath had come — he used to imagine that he had been called unto this work by God Himself; he felt as if he were doing a good work. He took hold of the long rope with a great reverence, and as he pulled there was a beautiful expression on his old face; no one would have recognised the old labourer in him. And as he pulled the rope a small voice seemed to chime in with the ringing of the old bell: "I call them, oh, God! I call them, oh,



God! I will not leave one at home, oh, Lord! They shall all come to thy Temple, oh, Lord!" And when he saw the large number of people gathered together in God's house, he would look at them from his seat by the door with secret joy, as if he were saying: "I have done this, Lord!" And he would gaze up at the preacher with a wonderful look in his eyes, as if he wanted to say: "Now they are all gathered together and you must do your best, or my work will have been in vain!"

But that was all before the great drought. Now, when he climbed up the steps to the rope he was overcome with fear. He scarcely dared touch the rope. He looked out of the small window and across the fields; a curse lay upon the land, and upon its people. He saw the dry bed of the river in the distance; a curse lay upon the river. He watched the cattle, scattered here and there on the wide meadows: a curse lay upon the cattle. A voice from heaven seemed to call out to him: 'Iting, when you come to appear before me, who has required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Your Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity.' He knew this part of the Book of Isaiah very well; he used very often to read it in those days;

that text, it seemed to him, had been specially written for him. How then should he dare to touch the rope? He could not do it.

An hour afterwards, when Walter had called him to his house, to reprimand him for neglecting his duties, he said: "Sir, do you remember that text in Scripture about the calling together of the assemblies: 'I cannot away with it; it is iniquity?' That text was written for me? How then can I ring the church bell?"

And only after much persuasion and finally a strict order, had he climbed up the steps of the tower once more and started to pull the bell. He had stood there with shaking knees and trembling hands. The people said that they did not even hear the ringing at the other end of the village, not even at Green's cottage. And after that day, on all the following Sundays, as long as the curse rested upon Eastloorn, Ilting the bell-ringer had done his duty as one of those who had committed and was committing most sins.

He was ashamed. Every one was ashamed. The people felt ashamed as they went to church. The incident about the bell-ringing had leaked out, and the general opinion was that the minister had been in the wrong. That

text from Isaiah was the subject of conversation as they walked together and went into the church. Some of them turned back after they had already entered the door. Soon there were empty seats in pews which had never been empty before. Every Sunday there were more people who remained at home. With a curse resting upon them, they felt that they had no right to enter a holy place. And if they did join in the divine service they felt as if they had done wrong. They were ashamed and made up their minds not to make the same mistake another time.

There were even some of the elders who stayed at home. They began to doubt whether they were really called by God to fulfil their office.

"I have put forth my hand to the ark of God as Uzza did," Kremar said one day to Danik.

Danik, who was not very bright, failed to understand the allusion.

"Have you not read it in the Bible, Danik?" Kremar explained, "that David wanted to take the Ark to Jerusalem? The Ark stood in the house of Abinadab, which was at Gibeah, and Uzza and Ahio, the two sons of Abinadab, drove the cart, upon which the Ark of God

was set. And when they came to Nachon's threshing-floor the oxen stumbled and Uzza put forth his hand to the ark of God. What a fool Uzza must have been! Did he think that the Ark wherein God lived could not save itself? God smote Uzza on the spot, Danik, for his error, and there he died by the Ark of God! Do you see, Danik, that it is possible for a man to act as Uzza did? What right has a man to become an elder? Does he imagine that God requires him, and that everything cannot go on quite well without him?"

Kremar dared not enter the church after that day so long as God's anger was upon Eastloorn. He felt ashamed of being an elder, and the general opinion was that he was quite right. Every Sunday there were fewer people in the churches.

But something else took place before it came to this.

When on the day of prayer God's anger became manifest, there had been a great change.

Gelf's wife said: "This anger has come upon us because we have strayed from the Church; we have been tempted by the Dissension, we must go back!" And the next Sunday Gelf's wife and her three big sons were seen sitting

in their former seats in Walter's Church, as if they had never been away. Many others followed their example, driven by the same motives.

On the other hand, Ubbo, the fisherman, said to his wife and children: "The Lord's wrath has come over us, because we have been disobedient to His voice, calling us from the Church." On the next Sunday the fisherman and his family sat among Senserff's congregation. And many others followed his example, driven by the same considerations.

The two ministers were surprised at their congregations. No one could tell which of the two was the more grieved. But this phenomenon stopped, and more and more people stayed away altogether. The two worthy men were seen walking together, near the old oak tree, in close conversation, as if they were confiding to each other their great sorrow. The two ministers also were overcome with shame, and each Sunday they felt it anew.

The sense of shame was mixed up with the daily life of the people.

When Iken went to have a look at his buckwheat field, — and he could do that as often as he felt inclined, for he had nothing else to



do, — when Iken went to have a look at his buck-wheat, he would stand there not knowing what to do, and he felt ashamed. Had he dared to blame Providence, he would have said: "Lord, it is thy doing; thou wilt not allow the seed to take root, and thou wilt not send rain!" But he blamed himself.

"Kassens," he said, "the seed is no good. I have not been careful; do you remember last year when the seed was brought in so damp, I thought it would do for sowingseed. But I should have taken other seed. I did not keep it dry enough in winter either. You see, my boy, I have done a foolish thing." He felt ashamed.

"Wilps," he said to his next door neighbour, "I was too late this year with my sowing. It is my own fault; I should have started burning the heath three weeks earlier; then the night dews would have made it come up. At that time there was enough mist from the river; but when I started sowing it was too late and there was no more dew. Why did I put off burning the heath so long?" He felt ashamed.

After he had spoken to several other people in the same manner, he gave it up. He was afraid they might think that he was secretly

wanting to blame Providence, and blaming himself with his lips only.

He avoided any conversation about his fields. He could not tell people that in the secrecy of his own inner-room, he also blamed himself. What man in Eastloorn ever told any one what he prayed in his inner-room? For in that case he would have to admit that he prayed; "Oh, Lord, the buck-wheat is not coming up; but I can tell thee alone that is not the fault of the seed, or the burning of the heath. I do not blame the drought either. No, oh Lord, it is on account of my sins. I know it, oh Lord; thou visitest my sins on me and on my house. Oh Lord, I confess my sins before thee, even my secret sins, and the sins of my youth; punish me, but do not wipe me out from thy Book." And he had not even ventured to pray for his buck-wheat.

He was ashamed to be seen by any one. When he saw the minister coming in the distance, he jumped across a hedge and disappeared out of sight, so that when his wife went to look for him, she could not find him and the minister did not meet him that day. Iken did not go to church either in those days. His field which was barren and bore no fruit, as the field of an accursed one,

seemed to accuse him day and night, in church, on the market, alone, and when among his friends. He went about with bent head, and ate very little.

As in a vision, which was not far off, he saw his harvest ruined, his barns empty, his wife and children without bread, he himself dishonoured, disgraced in the eyes of the whole village.

But how was he to be blamed then? What was his crime? He had not acted differently to all the others, he had always been righteous in his generation. And yet the drought had come and had scorched all his good works on the field of his spiritual life, and only an overwhelming sense of shame was left, as the reflection of the cloudless summer sky.

Everything was dying, without and within.

He felt ashamed, so that he became quiet and reserved, and refused to see any one.

When Jaris' old horse died, no one suggested that it might be of old age; it must be God's anger which was upon the beasts too. And that opinion was confirmed when two goats belonging to his neighbour were found dead in the stable next morning.

Schepers went to the marshes every day, to count his sheep. He was quite astonished

that there were none wanting. He wondered how the animals could possibly live with so little water to drink.

One day he saw a stag standing on the highest hill, a stag with large horns. The animal held his head up high, sniffing the wind as if he hoped to find some moisture in it. "It sniffs up the wind like the dragons," Schepers said in Bible phrase. He had never understood that verse before, but now it was quite clear to him. The stag was not seen again, either by him, or by the poacher who was always to be found, wandering about the fields. For there was no water.

God's anger rested upon all the meadows, and upon the fields, and upon the beasts, and upon the people.

Shame cannot live in the human heart for ever.

There is a shame which makes the blood rush to a girl's cheeks; but lo! a moment after the blush has died away; how great is the sense of shame when the blush is no longer on her cheeks?

There is another kind of shame, which comes gradually step by step, and finally conquers every other feeling; this shame takes away

all colour from a face and makes it deathly pale, and brings a wild, questioning look into the eyes, as of one who questions and gets no answer. That sense of shame is deeper and of longer duration; it lives in the human heart, but then at last it dies out until nothing is left.

Who can say how long a sense of shame will live in the human heart?

In Eastloorn, it lived for five or six weeks. Then it also died out, as all the other feelings which had come before had done. September had come. And how could any one expect the sense of shame to exist longer?

When September came, all the people had become indifferent.

Indifferent.

Did they still look at the sky, when they came outside in the mornings? Did they still go to the back of the house to look towards the West? And did they gaze at the horizon? Did they put up their hand, to feel the direction of the wind? And did they still listen to the rustling of the dry branches in the white poplars? Did they still rub their fingers across the boards of the well, to feel if there had been any dew during the night?

No one did these things any more.

Where they still sad, as their eyes wandered



over the potato-fields? Did they still take a stroll to their cornfields, or to their meadows? Were they still disappointed when they saw the shining milk pails, standing there unused? Did they listen to the encouraging words of their ministers, who were more faithful than ever in visiting them; did they still listen to their kind words? Were they bewildered as they remembered how in former years, at this time, the hay stacks were quite ready?

No, a great indifference had come over every one and over everything.

But it was an indifference which suddenly changed into wildness; the inhabitants of Eastloorn became wilder than they had ever been before.

Afterwards they tried to explain exactly how that wildness had come about. And the general opinion was that it had begun at the time of the Fair.

Yes, to be sure, there had been a Fair in the neighbouring town. And all the young people had gone there; for at any rate there was no work to be done. Why should they not go after all? And then the older ones went too. The people had behaved disgracefully at that Fair. They finished all their money in the public-houses. Those who never entered a

public-house went then. Those who were never drunk, were drunk then. Men and women who were usually an example to others had lost all self-control in their wanton excitement. No one dared mention the subject afterwards. Several young men were caught and taken away by the policeman. There were twice the usual number of marriages this year.

Who cared what happened? Who could still think?

Even when the Fair was over, the wildness did not stop; there was more swearing and blaspheming than any one had ever heard before. The young men wandered round in other villages to pick quarrels, and bragged about their deeds of violence for days after.

The village was no longer the village. The people no longer talked in their former sweet and gentle manner, excusing everything, forgiving everything; but in a hard, brutal, cantankerous manner, hurting others and inflicting wounds and then revelling in those wounds.

Now that God had forsaken his people, what use was there in being good? How could they be good? For all they cared, Satan might rule upon earth.

The psalm, sung by a heavy man's voice and a shrill woman's voice, mingling with the

voices of children, was only heard in very few houses at that time. But it sounded strange, as voices from another world. The wild songs of noisy boys passing by had the upper hand.

It was at this time that Ake's lost son suddenly returned to the parish.

"What should prevent him coming back?" he thought, "for they were all prodigal sons now. Who could reproach him with any thing?"

One evening he was suddenly seen sitting in Sieds' public-house, holding a glass of gin in his hand. "Was that Joop?" they wondered.

"Yes, it is Joop; you are quite right; do you not recognise me? I have come back, for we all are alike now. We shall drink, boys, and fight!"

He, who before had been declared an outlaw, had been shunned by all, so that he had to leave the village, was now received with shouts of joy. It was as if it relieved them to find some one who was even more wicked than they themselves.

In the weeks that followed theft was the order of the day, — theft and incendiarism, unnecessary incendiarism on the heath and in the woods, as far as to the German town. And Joop was the soul of all that wantonness. The

older people in the village could not prevent the young ones following him. The young girls were afraid of him, and did not venture out on the street in the evenings.

But he disappeared as suddenly as he had come. One fine day he was gone, and no one set eyes on him again. They supposed he had gone to the distant city, to Rotterdam, of which he had bragged to his eager listeners. No one could say with any certainty why he had gone.

But a vague rumour went abroad that he had quarrelled with big Garst, who lived near Southloorn, because his pretty sister Reeze had come home very late one night, crying, and with torn clothes. She had cried all night, and all next day. And she would not tell any one what it was about, not even her mother.

"Was it Joop?" Garst had asked his sister afterwards, when he found her alone one day behind the stable.

She had not answered, but she gave a loud cry and ran into the house, with arms outstretched and clenching her fists, and a terrified look in her eyes.

And Garst knew then that it was Joop.

And two days later Joop had disappeared from the village for good; he was afraid that

big Garst might find him alone one day on the moor.

Then a deep silence came over Eastloorn, even in the thoughts of the people. Who could still think? They were tired and exhausted with thinking, always thinking about the same subject for eight months.

The silence brooded everywhere. There was no sound to be heard in the pine trees, no rustling of leaves in the white poplars. The pine trees had dropped their brown needles, and the poplars stretched their bare and withered branches heavenwards; all the leaves lay on the ground.

There was no more longing for rain. What would be the good? The time had passed; it was too late. What good could the rain do at the end of September? Everything was lost and could not possibly be put right again.

The people went on living mechanically. They got up early in the morning, as they had always done; they went to bed early, as they had always done; and they ate the little they had to eat.

But no one's thoughts were different in the evening to what they had been in the morning; no one seemed to think at all, either before,



during, or after the meal. No one thought while the chapter from the Bible was being read after the meal.

No one said: "Why am I not working to-day?"

No one talked with his fields; even Sander had ceased to do that.

The bell-ringer no longer thought as he was ringing; he had no more scruples.

No one said: "I am sad."

And no one said: "Why am I not cheerful?"

Oh, the silence was very deep in Eastloorn, in the woods, on the moor, in the houses, and in the hearts of men.

For all they cared, everything in their lives and everything in nature might have remained just as it was. There was no more hope. The time for that had passed. But, when all expectation and all desire had died away, then the change came. It was quite natural that it should come, but no one took any notice. Only later on, in winter, they often spoke about it. And then they remembered all that had gone before.

It was about the middle of October. And it happened in this way. One morning the sun shone through a thin, a very thin, haze.

There were no clouds, no mist, yet there was a greyish look about the sky.

A day later, — the same thing, a little more pronounced this time. The sky looked a trifle greyer. In the evening the stars looked less clear and bright; they twinkled in the sky with a very small, faint light, without any life.

Yet a day later — the same thing, still more pronounced. That morning, Schepers, standing on the hill where he had seen the stag, could not discern the town steeples; and in the afternoon he could not see even the Southloorn church tower. Was that caused by a mist from the sea? "If it had' been a damp mist, I should have seen it on the barrel of my gun," the poacher remarked.

Yet a day later, — the same thing, but still more pronounced. The sun no longer had an aureole of sunbeams, but an aureole of mist, and it was there until sunset. Had it been the time of the burning of the heath, one might have thought it was caused by the smoke.

A day later, — the same thing, still more pronounced. Standing by the bridge at the entrance to the village, one could not see the dyke where Ebel's windmill stood. The

mill was still visible, but the sails where not. Towards the afternoon Laker's pine-wood looked like a floating island, sometimes hidden from view, sometimes clearly visible. The bridge-man, looking at the dry river-bed, as he had done so often during all those long months, noticed that there was a little moisture on the rail of the bridge.

Next morning there was moisture over all the country and on the roofs of the houses. There was no sun to be seen. One could only tell by a patch of light in the sky where the sun was. It was also colder, as cold as it is in November. The cattle in the meadows stood herded together. And the fisherman saw a gull skim the surface of the water, where the bulrushes grew: and a moment after he saw another gull.

And the next day it came. Very gently, very slowly, as moist vapour descending upon earth; then small drops, very small drops, and at last, at last, rain; a rain which came in a steady downpour for days and weeks.

But no one rejoiced in Eastloorn.

The people were still wrapped in that deep silence.

The deliverance had come too late, for

winter was fast approaching. Winter, without any glad thoughts of a full haystack, and without any thoughts of potatoes to be dug up, and wheat to be threshed in the barn, and without even any certainty of daily bread. Winter now stood for poverty. The silence might have brooded over Eastloorn for a good long time.

If something unexpected had not happened one Sunday, the people would not have been roused from dull despair; they might not have begun to think again until next Spring. This is what happened.

On that particular Sunday morning the Jew's wife had said to her husband: "Jacob, what are you doing? You are putting on the wrong clothes. It is not the Sabbath to-day; what is the matter with you?"

And he had said: "Sarah, be quiet. I am going to church, to Mr. Walter's church; I want to see if the people can rejoice when the minister speaks to them. Sarah, be thrifty, I used to say!"

And the congregation had seen him standing in the church, by the pillar near the door, during the whole service.

No one had stared at him as if he thought: "What business has the Jew to come here?"

Jacob thought they were all very polite, not to show their astonishment.

And when, after the service, the churchwardens met in the vestry, and when they emptied the collection bags on the table, in order to count the money, they were startled and looked at each other in surprise; for, on the table, among all the small coins, lay a bank-note of a thousand guilders.

It was in that week that the inhabitants of Eastloorn began to think again, and that hope revived.

And this new hope was brought about by yet another incident.

In the vestry of the Dissenting Church Senerff had said to his churchwardens: "Brethren, I have heard about the thousand guilders which have been given in the other church. The Jew was ahead of the Christian this time, but that cannot be helped; I only wish that I had spoken a week sooner; then it would have been different. For I intend to hand over my stipend for half a year to the poor fund. As you know, I have no wife, and no children; I can afford to do it better than any of you. May God help the poor!"

Then the villagers once more began to think,



and also to work; and the old piety returned. Eastloorn was as it used to be.

That week Wiegen, the Dreamer, was in a difficult fix. Young Dreese, who was a little like his father, and was also addicted to asking questions which were not liked by every one, had enquired of Wiegen, as the men were collected together on the Square one evening: "Tell me, Wiegen, is Jacob, the Jew, also a member of your invisible Church?"

The Dreamer had not answered at all, Kremar, one of the churchwardens, however, helped him out of the difficulty. "Say it yourself, Dreese!" he said. But Dreese refused to do this.

## VI

### AKE, THE MAD WOMAN

Ake was the mad woman in the village.

It is a well-known fact that there is a mad person in nearly every village. In Southloorn it was a young man, who always sat by the side of the road, under a hawthorn tree. In Oestwold there was Mrs. Jannink's daughter, a girl with long plaits, who sold brooms. And in all the other villages in the neighbourhood there was one. And they never did any one any harm.

In Eastloorn there was Ake.

Ake was quite mad. She had been mad for so long that scarcely any one had known her to be sane.

For many a year they had seen her walking about the village with a heavy bundle of wood on her back, carrying a thick stick in her old hands. She walked with a firm tread, without looking at, or speaking to, any one, — so that

no one could picture her doing anything else.

Only rich Mrs. Goestel, the old baker's widow, who was of the same age as Ake, could remember her otherwise. When they were both very young they had gone to school together, when Mr. Jansen was schoolmaster. But none of the other people could remember that time; three other masters had taken Mr. Jansen's place since then.

"How long has she been mad, Mrs. Goestel?" Walter enquired one day.

"I believe it must be forty years; oh, quite that, for I am sixty-four now. Yes, yes, it must be quite that," the baker's widow answered, pensively.

"But how did it all come about, Mrs. Goestel?" Walter said, for he wanted to get to the bottom of the mystery.

"No one ever knew the exact story," Mrs. Goestel answered, as if she were talking to herself and wished to avoid inquisitive questions.

But Walter persisted; he was determined to know more than all the other villagers.

"Well, you must have heard one fact often enough from others," she said. "We were both keeping company, Ake and I. Then I married, and Ake did not. And we both had a child

christened on the same day. That was a terrible disgrace for her. She was so pale and she trembled so that the verger, the one before this one, had to hold the baby at the font; the verger did that! And in coming out of church the boys called him 'Godfather,' and he kept this nickname until he died."

Walter never found out any more. The baker's widow had not given him any more information than any man or woman in the village could do.

But the history was quite clear to Walter's vivid imagination, a history such as he had often read in novels... the disgrace of a deserted girl... a breach of promise;... the anxious months, in expectation of the disgrace which would be public property then;... the christening, without a husband who should have stood beside the mother;... the quiet retirement into her own home;... thinking, day and night, year after year, about the one subject, always the same subject... until gradually, very gradually, a period came when it was difficult to draw the line between sane thinking and insane thinking;... and, finally, those strange manners, which had made all the villagers talk about her as "crazy Ake."

Walter had a vivid fancy, he could weave

out long histories in his imagination; but this time it gave him pain, — and the pain gave him a vague idea what the suffering must have been to the woman herself during all those long years, a suffering which made the poor woman mad at last.

Ake was mad now, that was certain.

She never harmed any one, even when the boys shouted after her, as she walked through the village.

She stepped steadily on, with the bundle of wood on her back; the boys might laugh and tease and come as near as they liked; she never even raised her stick at them. They always stopped at the bridge, at the end of the village street, they never went any further. She knew that; and only the very little boys shouted; the big ones had given it up long ago. The people in Eastloorn were always courteous and well-bred, even to Ake.

She had noticed this in spite of her dumbness. She knew that when these boys were but a year older they would stop doing such foolish things. She did worry a little about the new generation, which would surely be there to tease her. Why, she wondered, did the women always go on having children?



But at this query her brain seemed to stop working suddenly, and she would wipe something away from in front of her eyes with her hand.

The people often saw her doing this with her hand; it was a habit.

Ake went to church regularly. Formerly she used to go to Walter's church, but afterwards she went to the Dissenting church, Senserff's church. She always had her own seat in the old church, and now in the new, and was never troublesome during the service.

She knew exactly how long to keep her eyes shut when the minister prayed; she knew that when the Amen was said it was time to open them.

When the Psalm was given out it always took her a long time to find it. She could not understand why no hymns were given out in Senserff's church, only Psalms. She thought she must surely be getting deaf; and when the second Psalm was being sung she always persisted in turning over the leaves of the hymn book, and at last pretended to have found it. The women sitting next to her on either side saw this.

During the sermon, she sat with a vacant

look in her eyes, always gazing at the door, as if she were expecting some one to come in who never came. Occasionally she would wipe something away from in front of her eyes; this was a habit.

When the collection bags were handed round she always gave two cents; that was more than many others gave; the deacons were quite sure that she put in two cents.

"I can feel it," Niesink, the bee-farmer said. It was etiquette for the deacons to collect with their heads turned away, as if they wanted to say that they knew quite well that it was not the thing to spy at what the others were giving. "I can feel it," Niesink said; "every one can develop a fine sense of feeling with that long pole in his hand. The other day when the old widow of the clogger came to church on the anniversary of her husband's death, she put a bank-note into the bag. I knew at once that the ten guilders were from her."

When church was over, Ake was treated in the same way as any one else; she came out in the midst of the throng, and as she went up the road no one would have known her to be "crazy Ake."

And at Whitsuntide no one appeared to notice the strange thing she did either. For

when church was over it was the custom, — and no one in Eastloorn ever knew from what time that custom dated, — that the married women went up to the flowering hawthorn tree which stood on the left side of the church door on the Square. Each woman then plucked a flower from the tree and fastened it on to her husband's hat, so that every one on the Square could see it. It was a joyous sight to see these women do that, and the men, decorated in this manner, had a festive appearance. Ake also always joined the others in picking a flower; for did she not belong to the married women too? But as soon as she held the flower in her hand, it was quite evident that she got muddled; for to whom was she to give the blossom, and whose hat was she to decorate with it? She looked round at the people on the Square feeling embarrassed; and again she wiped some imaginary thing from before her eyes and walked up the road slowly, holding the twig in her hand. Not one person on the Square ever appeared to notice what a mad thing Ake was doing. She did it every year, and they were all convinced that she kept every one of those withered twigs in her hut beside the hymn book in the cupboard.

But although Ake went to church very regularly, whenever there was a christening or a celebration of holy communion, she never appeared. It was a wonder she never made a mistake! She knew how to distinguish between the two.

No one knew why she had joined the Dissenting church. There had been much talk about it, that even a mad woman had taken a side in the ecclesiastical struggle! When she came to Walter to tell him of her plans, he had not been able to get anything out of her. Nor had Sernserff succeeded any better. The only thing she had said to Sernserff was; "Perhaps I shall find him with you."

"Who then, Ake?" Sernserff questioned.

"Him, of course," she had said. "He did not come into the other church, though I waited for years; perhaps he will come in here."

And Sernserff had not been able to find out anything else. But later, much later, when he knew all, he understood how it was that during the sermon she always sat gazing at the door with vacant eyes.

There was another thing that the people knew about Ake. Every one knew that she had had a naughty boy; that was the boy

she had seen christened without a father. The boy's name was Joop. And he had become a bad boy.

It had all begun at school. No one had been able to persuade him to go to school regularly. He had always been at loggerheads with the schoolmaster. He was wild; not like the other children in Eastloorn; foreign blood flowed through his veins.

"An impudent German!" the master had once called him. And that saying had leaked out and was repeated from mouth to mouth, and Ake started visibly when the boy told her how the master had nicknamed him. "Never tell me again what the master called you," she said, and Joop had not understood why.

When he grew up, he refused to find work; he ran about idle. His only occupation was to snare hares, to dig out rabbits, to lie out on the marsh in winter on the look-out for German mountain ducks. What else could he do? He was constantly in and out of the public-house; he fought; once he even attacked the village constable, so that he was put in prison for a few months. The young man had become the terror of the moor and of the wood. Who liked to meet him on a lonely part of the moor?

One day, and that was more than twenty



years ago, Ruurd, the son of Ilting, the bell-ringer, had been found dead in a field near Iken's buck-wheat field. One could see that there had been a fierce struggle, for the buck-wheat had been trodden down on that spot, and the white flowers were red with blood. Suspicion had fallen on Joop, but the court of justice had not been able to find enough evidence. Joop had denied it; and the half silly mother had been witness that he had slept at home that night. He had walked about the village in an impudent manner for several days after that, for a week in fact. But then suddenly he had disappeared, and had never been seen again during the first years.

A rumour went about that he had enlisted for the East; but no one could be sure of it. Some said that he got a place among the dock-labourers in Rotterdam. One thing was certain, however, that since that day Ake had become absolutely mad.

There were only a few people in the village who thought that she had more sense than one might imagine.

Ake lived near the German border — about two hours' walk from the inhabited part of the community.

Few people ever came as far as that. There the moor extended as far as the eye could see.

Just on the outskirts of the village were the large farms, and they were surrounded by fruit-trees. It was a beautiful sight when the trees were blossoming, white and red. Further up lay the fields, the corn-fields, and higher up the buck-wheat fields. Then came the wooded part, — oak-groves where the wood-cutter found enough work to do in spring. Then the pine-woods; and finally the moor, first in small patches, and then in bigger patches, until the wide heath extended far into Germany, endless, immeasurable, boundless. Which of the villagers ever came as far as that?

The German merchant, Asmus, who bought up all sorts of things and visited Eastloorn once a month, always came across the heath. He knew how far the moor extended, but the people did not believe him when he said that it took weeks to reach the other side of the heath.

"Weeks, Asmus? Weeks?" they would enquire, with the suspicious manner of people who think that foreigners are always trying to take them in.

"Certainly," he answered; "from here the

moor extends to the Ems, that is a river you know; and to the North it extends to the province of Groningen; that is the Bourtangermarshland. Many a time I have slept out on the moor, lying on a knoll, because there was not even a hut to be found, surrounded by wet soil; soil that does not look like water, and yet if you tried to walk on it you would be drowned. I have seen the Will-o-the wisps; poor children! they never rested, and when two flames came close together, they would whisper for a moment and dance off again. I do not know how many die without being christened, but judging from the number of lights that burn on the moor there must be a great many every day!"

"Are those things you tell us about quite true, Asmus?"

"Of course they are! I have also seen the White Women when I slept on the knoll, surrounded by marshes. They are ugly, and they have long arms; they swing about their arms, as if they want to catch you. I lay very still, I can assure you; they never saw me."

"Mr. Walter says, that we must not believe in those things any more, but Schepers himself saw them past Ake's hut, when he used to look after the sheep; and Schepers is a

truthful man who never says a thing if it is not true. You know Schepers, do you not, Asmus?"

"I am sure Ake sees them too, if she would only say so," the German resumed. "To whom otherwise does she talk in the night when she stands outside of her hut in the snowstorm? I found her there one night last winter when I could not get any farther and when I lay on the floor in her hut, while she poked up the fire. She is a good soul, although she is half silly. I could not get any farther in that snowstorm; I would surely have perished that night, if she had not taken me in. A good soul!"

The men in the public-house liked having a chat with the German in the long evenings; he knew all the people who lived between the river Vecht and the Ems, as far as Aurich.

Otherwise few people ever came near Ake's hut, only Schepers when he went to look at his sheep, and the beefarmer when he took out his hives or brought them back again on his high cart.

The people wondered how the old woman could come that long walk to the village and back again every Sunday. And how could she do it again once every week, and come

back from the wood, which lay to the left of the village, carrying a bundle of sticks on her back?

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One day, Ake had gone out to gather wood again.

She came through the village carrying the heavy bundle on her back, and she rested a moment on the Square. The boys had run after her as usual until she reached the bridge, then they had left her to go on alone.

She was talking all the time after she had crossed the bridge. It was a heavy burden to carry, every one could see that.

"If only I were at the alder-wood," she murmured. And she came to the alder-wood. There she rested without taking the heavy burden from her shoulders.

"If only I were at the Giants' graves," she said to herself. And she came to the Giants' graves. There she rested without taking the heavy burden from her shoulders.

"If only I were at the little bridge which lies across the stream," she said to herself. And she came to the little bridge which lay across the stream. There she rested without taking the heavy burden from her shoulders.



"If only I were at the quarry," she said to herself. And she came to the quarry where the stones were dug out, the stones which were used to pave the roads. There she rested without taking the heavy burden from her shoulders.

But that was the last mile-stone on her road. Then came the wide, open moor without a tree, without a shrub, and without a stream or a bridge. In summer it was sunny, shadeless and hot, and biting cold in winter. But she carried her burden from there to her hut, without a rest, straight on, until she laid it in the shed behind her hut.

When she had put down her bundle of sticks, and walked to the door at the side of the house, facing the West, — who was sitting on the ground in front of the door?

The sun was just setting. It shone with a red glow on the old woodwork, and on the thatched roof, and on the man who sat on the ground by the door.

The woman was never startled.

"Do you want to go in at the door, Mother?" he asked, without getting up. "Then you know what you must do first, Mother!"

And the old woman knew what he expected her to do. She came up to him, bent down

and kissed the man as she clasped him in her stiff arms.

He pulled her towards him and let her sit on his knees. And so those two people sat there, and gazed into each other's eyes.

"Do they say that you are bad, my boy? It is not true! For who ever kissed me beside you, Joop, and that other man whom I never saw again?"

"And do they say that you are mad, Mother? It is not true! Your eyes are all right, as they always used to be."

"Could you not do without your little mother any longer, Joop, and have you come at last? I have waited a long time."

"Oh, Mother, there is only one who loves me; all the others have feared me; but you. . ."

And the man kissed his old mother, again and again, as one kisses a child, as she sat quietly on his knees on the ground by the door, in front of the hut. A hard crust of ice which had formed round the lonely woman's heart began to melt.

"Do you want coffee, boy? And do you want bread? I have done what you asked me to do; surely I may go in now? Let me go now!"

"No, Mother, remain sitting; you are quite

comfortable so, are you not? When I am gone to-morrow you will have no one to love you any more."

And the woman gave in, she gave in gladly.

"Why do you not come to church, Joop? I always watched the door, thinking you might come in. And you never came. Every Sunday I sit looking at the door. You know, Joop, that is the place where your Mother waits for you, for then no one will say again: 'That mother has a wicked son.' But they will say, 'That man goes to church, as others do. He has turned over a new leaf.' Why do you come here and not there?"

"Why should I go to church? Do you know, Mother, that if I wished to come to church the young men would crowd together on the Square as if they were saying: 'Just let's have a fight now.' They are brave enough when they are ten against one, but none of them ever dared fight against me alone. They are frightened when they stand together like that, I have seen it in their eyes. And do you know, Mother, that if I came to church, the girls would look at me ashamed and run home? Have I ever harmed any girls here besides Kaare, who is dead, and Dennigje, who was afterwards married to Gunter?"

He did not mention golden haired Reeze, for more than one reason.

"And perhaps you do not know, Mother, that if I went to church, the men and women would stand on one side, and that they would whisper to each other: 'There is Joop, who killed the son of the bell-ringer on Iken's buck-wheat field.' How can I come to church, Mother! where all the people would like to frighten me away with their eyes, and where all the people are false? For they are false. Do you remember the great drought last year? I could have come back then; they were all just as bad as I am then; and no one said to me: 'You are wicked!' But now all the boys are pious again! They are all good-for-nothing, Mother; I am better myself! And that is why I must not come!"

"I shall wait for you, Joop, and every Sunday I shall look out for you. I shall wait long, boy; I waited long for your father, and he never came, but I shall wait longer for you!"

"How can I be good, Mother? When I was at school I said: 'Now, I shall try and please the master to-day.' And when I came out of school I had behaved badly once more. Sometimes, when I went to the moor, I said: 'I shall not snare any more hares.' But when

evening came, I went out in the moonlight to set the traps. It is so beautiful when the hares play in the moonlight, Mother! Sometimes when I had dug out rabbits, I would say: 'I shall throw them away when I see the policeman.' But just that day I had fought with him. When I went to the village on an afternoon I would say: 'I shall not stand talking at Sieds' stable near the public-house about his horse.' But when I came home in the evening I was drunk again. How can I be good, Mother? When I killed the bell-ringer's son, — for you know as well as I do, Mother, that I did it, — I had said to him the day before: 'Look here, Ruurd, do not laugh at me, when we meet each other. I shall let you have the girl, although I could easily break your ribs for you, man; but if you do not laugh at me, I will leave you alone.' And early next day when I met him at Iken's buck-wheat field, he laughed after all. I had to kill him! How can I be good, Mother?"

"But you are good now, my little boy! You are good to-day; have you not let me sit on your knee? And have you not kissed me, as good boys kiss their mothers?"

"Yes Mother, but how can I know what I shall do to-night, or what I shall do to-



morrow? Have I not often come back to you in this way? And was the sun not setting, as it is now, while you sat on my knee? And did I not go away next morning to the big town where there are so many such as I am? Mother, mother, I must be what I am!"

And reluctantly he put the old woman down; he did it gently, but with a firm hand.

And he got up, stretching himself to his full length; gazing, with clenched fists, in the direction of the village, where all those people lived who had not been predestined at their birth to do evil, as he had been.

"Give me some coffee, mother," he said.

And they went inside, crazy Ake and her son, the vagabond.

When Ake woke up early next morning, — it was before sunrise, — she was lying on the floor beside her bed.

She tried to collect her thoughts. How was it that she was lying on the floor?

She looked at her bed. Some one had lain there! But why had she not slept in it herself then? She could not understand. Who had been there?

And on the table she saw a loaf of bread, and the coffee-can, and cups, which had not

been washed the evening before. Cups? And she always used only one cup? Whose was that other cup, then? Had she had a visitor, she who never had one? The last time she had had a visitor was when her son came one night, two years ago. She had let him sleep in her own bed then, she herself had lain on the floor.

By degrees her head became clearer. Had he come again last night, then? She tried to think and went on gazing at the bed.

But it came back to her, all about Joop and what had happened the evening before. And her warm mother's heart still beat faster at a vague and happy memory, — a memory of an embrace and a kiss. She was an old woman, very old; but, for that embrace, she would willingly have given up a few years of her life as often as she could get it.

Had Joop got up in the night then, long before daybreak, as he had done before? And had he stolen away quietly, as he had done before?

She could not find out whether or not it had really taken place. "People say I am mad," she murmured; "how then can I know if he has been here?"

She was clear enough to notice that the

drawer of her cupboard was open; in it she kept the few guilders which she had saved; and she knew that, if she looked, she could be sure whether he had been or not. She could know it by the money. And why then did she not go to the cupboard? And why then did she look at that cupboard with eyes averted, as one who does not wish to know the worst?

All that day she pondered the great question wearily. Had he been or had he not been? And when the evening fell she did not know yet. Next morning it was still more difficult to find out.

And soon the incident became as hazy as all the other memories of her life. Ake was just as mad as ever.

"That woman is not mad," Schepers said to Senserff one day.

They were on their way to visit her, and they were standing on the little bridge which lay across the stream which severed the pine-woods from the moor, that little bridge where Ake always rested, with the bundle of sticks on her back.

In front of them lay the huge, boundless expanse of sunny moorland, and in the distance they could discern Ake's hut. The minister

and the elder had been confronted with the question whether or not to visit Ake. For every one knew that she was mad, and they surely could not include her in the invitation to partake of the Holy Communion, which was to be celebrated in church next Sunday, and which they were announcing to the parishioners.

But: "That woman is not mad!" Schepers had said to Senserff at last. "I have often been to see her when I went towards the East to see my sheep at the marsh. Who can say that she is not quite sensible? For which of the villagers has ever spoken to her? I am the only one who has ever been to see her; and she has always received me warmly; she gave me water to quench my thirst, and in winter she placed a chair for me by the fire and threw on an extra log of wood, so that I might warm my numb feet. Have you ever spoken to her, sir?"

"No, Schepers; she has only been at my house once, that was when she joined our church, and do you not remember how the members of the Reformed Church envied us for that? I have never met her since then."

"Let us go then, sir," Schepers said. "The

invitation may not be withheld from any one who is not under censure."

Senserff yielded to this argument. And an hour later the two men stood at the door of Ake's hut.

"Come in, sir; come in, Schepers," the woman said.

She held the door open as they came in, and gave them chairs, as was customary. She herself remained standing by the chair at the bed-side. The two men glanced at each other. There was nothing wanting in this reception.

"Ake," the minister began, — for he never beat about the bush, — "Ake, I have come to invite you to partake of Holy Communion next Sunday."

Schepers watched the woman's face closely: there was reverence, great reverence in her honest eyes.

"How can you invite me?" she answered. "Surely you know what manner of woman I am?"

"What manner of woman I am?" Schepers repeated; "that is not an expression which is used by the people here, Ake. Did you find it in the Bible, Ake?" And Senserff, slower than his elder, remembered how the mad woman used the word that the



Pharisees had used to Jesus in connection with a similar woman.

Ake did not answer the question, but continued: "Do you not know that I have a son, who is the disgrace of the village? And how could I hold up my head in church, and sit at the Lord's table with those women who need not be ashamed of their sons?"

She spoke as a sensible woman; and Senserff braced himself up to answer her sensibly too. "The sins of a child need not prevent any one from coming to the Lord's supper, woman! Let every man's sins be on his own head! We do not invite your son, but you!"

"Shall each man's sins be on his own head, sir? Oh, I am glad! for then my sins shall be upon my own head, and not on my child's head! Is it his fault that he is as he is? Am I not his mother?" she said hotly.

And the elder glanced at Senserff, and his look said quite plainly: "Have I not told you that she is not mad?"

"Who says here that my son is at fault? Every mother shall bear the guilt of her children on her own head;" she went on quickly.

"But every father too, surely?" Senserff

ventured to add. It was a curious thing to be arguing this question with a mad woman, and he made up his mind to drop the subject. It was a subject to be discussed at the meeting of Classis \*), but here? It seemed to him that he was almost mad himself.

But the woman did not give him much time to think.

"That man... also... I suppose," she said gently, and with some hesitation, as if she were giving in, but reluctantly. "But... who knows the way of a man into a woman's heart? The man does not know, neither does the woman. If that heart were not open, he would never get in. Who can give the fault to the man?"

She was silent for some time, wrapped in thought. The elder was astonished; how did this woman know the Scriptures so well that she quoted words not known to many?

"I also know those words in the Bible, woman," Senserff said, and he quoted under his breath, almost as if he were reading aloud: "The words of Agur, the son of Jakeh: There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not: the way of

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\*) A meeting of Ministers.

an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent upon a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and the way of a man with a maid."

Instinctively Schepers looked round the hut to see where the woman's Bible lay.

"There is the Bible," she said, as one who understands everything; "but it is long ago that I read it. I have found everything with any reference to me years ago. Your curse is upon me, my son!"

The two men did not know what to say.

"I will tell you about it, sir," she continued, and she hurried on as if she were afraid that afterwards the old haze would come again over her thinking, and as if she wished to be quite clear as she made her confession. "I will tell you, sir. Schepers may hear it too, although he will not understand; for he has never been married. What does he know about a woman's passion? You see, sir," — and she was not looking at Schepers any more, and seemed to be speaking to the minister only — "if there is love, then the way of a man to a maid's heart is an easy one. She will sacrifice herself, and give him all. No one but a woman knows what a woman will do for the man she loves. When that German, that wild, tall German, came to see me, then my

heart was as wild and young as his. Why then should he be more to be blamed than I am? Did he attract me, or I him? If he stayed away for a week it was I who said: "Why did you not come?" If he went away towards the evening, it was I who said: "Stay." If he took me in his arms, it was I who could not let go. If a woman really wishes it, a man will not look at her longer than she desires; she can force him never to come back again. Is not the curse upon me, upon me?" And she would have gone on passionately.

But Senserff stretched forth his hand and said: "Be quiet, Ake, I know all about that!"

"I have repented, sir, — for I should have liked the curse to depart from me. I should have liked it for my son's sake, not for my own; for a woman such as I am would have committed the same sin again and again; I still love that man. But for my son's sake I hoped that the curse would be taken from me; I might have known that he would do badly, on my account; the mother's guilt is upon the children unto the third and fourth generation; I wanted to exonerate my child from that guilt. And my penalty was this. I sought in the Bible all the texts with reference to such a woman as I am; I started on the

first page and went on to the last page. And I said time upon time, as my eyes fell upon a curse, that is against me. Thine anger is righteous, oh Lord! Good women need not do that, sir; let them read the blessings and hold up their heads. Every text of that sort was like a burning coal in my hand, but I did not drop it out of my hand. Every text was like a heap of coals on my head, but I did not shake them off from my head; I let them lie there; they burned my head right through, up to where the brains are. No one but crazy Ake has ever known that pain. All these texts were flames, flames that surrounded me. I have walked among flames, but I did not beat them off with my hands. Who in the village ever knew that crazy Ake walked among flames as she went by?"

Here the poor soul paused for a long time.

But she continued at last.

"I have done penance, sir, and it was this. I would not evade the disgrace of the christening; for, if it were possible, I wished my boy to be no different to other children. But the difference began when the child was held to the font without a father; I could not take away that difference; and that difference has been there until this day. That difference



was there when he went to school; he noticed it himself on the play-ground, and afterwards on the Square, where the men come together in the evenings to talk; and he felt it when he came home. That boy never asked me about his father, for he was good to me.

"I have done penance, and it was in this way," she went on: "I have not talked to any of the people, men or women; I have lived in silence. I have not complained to any one and have asked no one for advice or help. I went my way alone. When at night I could not sleep, and tore my hair in agony, I would cry: 'It is right, oh Lord!' When I walked across the moor, where the marsh is, and put my foot in the water, I said: 'It is right that I should suffer, oh Lord!' and I pulled my foot out of the marsh. When I walked across the market to church and shame whispered in my ear: 'Do not go to church any more, they all look down upon you!' I said: 'It is right, Lord, that I should walk on the other side of the road.' For forty years I have said: 'It is right, Lord,' to whatever I felt and whenever the boys injured me when they followed me through the village and up to the bridge."

"I have done penance, until I did not know

what else to do. But the guilt remained, the guilt never left me; it was as if my heart contracted with it, and always the coals burned on my head, until they reached the brains. And I shall do penance until He, Whose name I have never mentioned in all these years, shall say: 'Depart from me, thou accursed one, into the eternal fire!' Oh, my son! my son! I have said: thy curse be upon me! and that curse is upon me!"

"But sir," — and, with a sudden movement she drew herself up to her full height as she asked, — "now my son is free, is he not, from the judgment which his mother brought upon him?"

Senserff fought a fierce struggle between his Christian doctrines and his pitying heart, and would have liked to avoid answering the question. Schepers also was watching him.

He wished to avoid the answer, — at a meeting of Classis he would not have hesitated for one moment, and he would have pointed out sharply that, "no mere creature can bear the burden of God's anger against sin, and so save other creatures from it." He answered evasively: "But Ake, — why did this man not marry you; why did he leave you alone?"

Suddenly her eyes looked vacant, as if she

were gazing into space. As one in a dream she repeated the words: "Yes, why... has... he... left me?"

But then, all at once, with a cry, the woman threw up her arms; a wildness which had been pent up for long years seemed to break loose; and she shrieked with the same despair as she had done in the beginning, when she had understood for the first time that he had deserted her; she shrieked as if she were raving.

Schepers jumped up from his chair and wanted to make for the door.

But Senserff held his arm, and said: "Do not be afraid, Schepers; that fury is only a fury against herself!" And he made the elder sit down again.

"If you have never before seen any one possessed of the devil, you must see it now," Senserff said. And indeed, they saw something very like it.

There the woman lay on the ground, hideously ugly. She pulled out the little hair she had: she tore the few clothes she wore to pieces, so that her thin limbs were shown; the men saw deep scars on the breast, as of old and new wounds caused by finger nails, sharp finger nails; even now she was tearing the flesh with her nails. The woman rolled

round and round; one moment she was lying on her back, the next, face downwards; she tried to gnaw the sand on the floor with her toothless gums; her mouth was foaming; she tried to get up, but failed again and again; there were wounds on her head and on her hands, caused by falling; and the cupboard and the fireplace were stained with blood.

The two men jumped up with a start; Senserff took hold of the mad woman with iron grip; he lifted her up as if she were a child, and laid her down on the bed, not letting her go for a long time, until the poor creature, who had been shaking convulsively, seemed to come to rest; the relaxation which followed was like death.

He remained sitting at the bed-side for a considerable time, until at last he said to his elder: "We can go outside, Schepers; she is asleep."

When they were outside they sat down on the rim of the well.

"We shall never know why he deserted her, man; I shall not dare to ask her a second time."

Schepers was silent; the pallor on his cheeks was death-like.

"Were you afraid of the devil?" Senserff enquired, with a curious laugh.

"No, sir, it is not that," he admitted, "but I tremble because I feel now what the Lord meant when He said: 'He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone at her!' But why do you laugh? Do you not believe that the Evil One is at work here?"

"What would the bee-farmer have said, if he had been present?"

"The bee-farmer would say: 'That is the devil, and this woman is damned'."

"And what would you say?"

"I should say: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for...."

"Finish it, Schepers; do not hesitate to say it, for I believe it, too... theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

That evening Schepers went home, and the minister remained in the hut with the sleeping woman until the dawn of day.

For those two men there was nothing unusual about the whole thing, but both of them, minister and elder, agreed that this mad woman was not far from, but very near, the kingdom of heaven.

Wiegen, the Dreamer, had known for long that she was a member of his Church.

When during the next winter, Ake died, no



one but Schepers could say that he had been present at that death-bed.

He was very sparing of his words when anyone questioned him about it.

But everyone knew that it was on a dark night, in a snowstorm, that Schepers had gone to her.

Asmus, the German merchant, who had come past her hut, had spread the report that the woman was dying. "Catch me spending a night alone with a mad and dying woman," he had said; "I took good care to be here before the snowstorm." But Schepers got up at once from his evening meal when his servant girl told him what the German had said at the inn.

"This is not a night for the minister to be out!" he had muttered, and he had gone outside with his dog. "Sipie, come here!" he had called, and he had taken the dog on a string, to make sure that he would not miss the road out in the dark night in the snow.

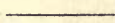
But no one ever heard what happened afterwards, out on the moor, in that lonely hut, at that death-bed. Schepers could be silent if he liked.

"Even a mad woman may not be allowed to die with none of those who have been appointed by the community for that purpose

present to make her death-bed easier. The other Church shall not say that we, elders, neglect the poor and the little ones." Not very much more than that ever leaked out, and by degrees the general opinion was that nothing special could have occurred at that death-bed.

Only, Schepers objected to the pulling down of Ake's hut, when such a proposal was made in the parish council. "The woman expressed a wish that the hut should remain standing as it is," he said; "there is a son who might come back."

And the hut was left standing there, in the wind and rain, and it went to rack and ruin. Sometimes the shepherd boy took a drink of water from the well. And now and then a hare would run past, close to the door. And a hawk would sit perched on the falling roof. But that was all. How long could that hut stand there?



## VII

### ILTING, THE BELL-RINGER

Ilting was not so very old yet; but he was such a shrivelled-up little man that people who did not know him often thought he was quite seventy. As a matter of fact, he was nearer sixty.

As he stood beside the minister in the vestry before the sermon, when he came to fetch the hymn sheet for the organist, he only reached up to Walter's shoulders. It must be admitted that Walter was very tall, but, on the other hand, Ilting was particularly small.

And as he was very thin and had a small face and absolutely grey hair, people often thought he was older than he really was. Also, few of the villagers had ever known another bell-ringer in Eastloorn; he had held that post for forty years, and so he might well be reckoned among the old men in the village.

"But look here," Ilting would sometimes

say to the elders; "there is Ake, who is much older than I; and the baker's widow, Mrs. Goestel; and you yourself, Kremar, you are four years older than I am. Do you remember that when we were at school together you were two forms higher than I was? And you, Wendel, did you not always defend me against the other boys at school, because I was so small and you so much older?"

And so a conversation about their boyhood was often started in the vestry, to which Walter liked to listen. These old men never forgot the days of their youth; and there was very little belonging to that time of which they needed to feel ashamed.

Ilting was the bell-ringer of the Reformed Church. The other church had not got a bell yet.

"When shall we have one?" the deacons would sometimes say; "we should have one too." Upon which Senserff always answered: "Oh, a bell is to be got; and I have no doubt that we shall have one some day; but that would not give us Ilting!" They would have liked him to join their Church; for they knew he was a good sort; but Ilting had refused to break away from the Reformed Church.

"No, no," he had said to Schepers, when he spoke to him about the matter, "I am not going to do it!" And that was all, he did not give any reasons.

But in the evening he had remarked to his wife: "Schepers wanted to persuade me to join them, but what would I do in the other church? I have pulled the rope here for forty years, and I could not bear to see another man standing in my place on Sundays. Besides that, the doctrine which Walter teaches us is no worse than Senserff's was! Why should I hand over the bell-rope to another man?" And his wife thought he was quite right in his judgment.

Those who knew him well were wont to say that his very soul was in the bell.

After Walter had been in Eastloorn a short time he had sent for Ilting one day. For Ilting was verger too.

"Listen, my friend," Walter had said, "I do not know everything yet; you must give me some information, for you, being the verger, are just the man for that. For instance, about the christening. Next Sunday there is a christening service, and I want to know whether it is the custom for the parents of



the child to give notice at my house on Saturday evenings? And tell me, will you, are there free seats in church, and, if so, have they all been taken?" And Walter asked him many more questions.

It was an important moment in the little verger's life, he giving information to the minister! "That is a man after my own heart!" he had remarked to his wife in the evening. "I assure you he takes things seriously and wishes to know the ropes! Look at Senserff now, he never asked me such questions. I suppose he found it all out by himself, or perhaps he learned it from the professor who taught him! But this one wants to learn from me! And I have helped him! Mark my words, he will not make any mistakes, although he is just starting!"

On that same occasion, Walter, who often had strange ideas for which he could not account, asked him suddenly: "Ilting, I hear you have been bell-ringer here for such a long time; are you not tired of pulling that rope for thirty or forty years?"

Ilting had seldom looked more astonished in his life. For one moment he looked confused, as some one would to whom it has been said: "What a poor job you have!

Have you never been able to do better than that?"

Then he pulled himself together, and his answer was like that of an old man reproving a boy.

"Sir," he had said, "I wonder what you would say if some one tried to make out that you do not really love your profession as a minister, but that you had only chosen it as a job, to earn money?"

"Then I should say that he was mistaken, and I should prove it by telling him how much my stipend is," Walter said, laughingly; "and he who still maintained that I did it for the pay I should call an ass to his face!"

"Sir, how can you think then that I could get tired of pulling the rope? Do you know how it is? Look here: when a man has just become a minister...."

"A bell-ringer," Walter corrected.

"No, I say what I mean!" Ilting said. "When a man becomes a minister he starts full of courage and with great expectations. He preaches his sermon as if it would be a joy for him every Sunday of his life. But, after this has gone on for some years, he begins to feel as if he has said all he had to say. And then he sits in his study, thinking: 'What

on earth must I say to the people? I have said it all, and some things I have told them twice!' That is a hard time for a minister. But after he has passed through that difficult stage, if he is the right man for his calling, his sermons will get more depth. Some ministers get it by losing a child. Other ministers get it by having to endure opposition from their own congregation. Others by being very poor, and not knowing how to make both ends meet, and still remaining honest men. But in any case they get it by coming through a great sorrow; never without that. But the depth in the nature comes, and then only are they able to preach a sermon as they never did before. And only then do they begin to love their office better than they ever thought they could. And, well, you had better not ask a minister of that sort whether he gets tired of preaching Sunday after Sunday. What do you think he would answer you?"

"How do you know all that, Ilting?" Walter asked, now quite seriously. For Walter had been one of those who had often wondered what he should find to say after he had been in the pulpit for several years. And this had become a source of great anxiety to him, and he knew that it would be even more so later on.

"How do I know that, sir?" Ilting said. "Do you think we, who sit in the pews and watch you while you are speaking, do not hear that? So many ministers have preached here; when the old minister was ill, and afterwards, when the old man was dead, and the ministers of the district came in turns, we had all sorts and conditions. But do you think we could not hear who had come through the great sorrow and who had not?"

Walter was very grave now: "And what about me? Must I also still come through the great sorrow?"

The little verger looked at his minister with frank and honest eyes, and gathering together all his courage, he said: "Yes, sir!"

Walter would have liked to shake hands with the old man, but he was afraid of any affectation, so he restrained himself. A brave feeling came over him, as if he hoped that the great sorrow might come soon; for he wanted to be a good minister.

"But, sir, I have not finished yet." the bell-ringer resumed. "All I said about a minister applies to a bell-ringer as well, in a small way. When we start ringing the church-bell shortly after our appointment, we do it with a beginner's zeal. We are delighted with our

appointment and with the extra pay in connection with it. And we give the rope a good tug and let it shoot high up into the air. I admit that's the way, you see! But after we have done it for a short time, the novelty of the thing begins to wear off. We forget all about the extra pay connected with it, and we forget that twenty others applied for the post at the same time as we did. And then our arms go up wearily and come down without an effort; how can the ringing be good then? The people can hear by the ringing for how many years a bell-ringer has been in the service. Do you not think so, sir?... And then in later years the depth comes. A man's soul is in the bell. People say it about me, and they may laugh; but it is quite true! When I am busy nowadays I know what I am doing. Oh, the happiness of saying to the people on Sundays: 'Stop working, and lay aside all care, and come to church, for the minister wants to tell you what God has given to the world!'

"Did you have to come through the great sorrow too, Ilting, before there was depth in your ringing?"

The little man did not answer. Walter understood, and asked again.



"Tell me, Ilting, what was your sorrow?"

But the little man did not answer.

Then Walter was silent too.

The minister and his verger often conversed together in this way, as the latter stood by the door full of respect and holding his cap in his hand, as long as it pleased the master to talk to him.

One thing was sure, however: the man's soul was in the bell.

The little man had a greater influence with his ringing in the parish than many a one thought, or than he imagined himself.

That was quite natural.

When he tolled the bell at six o'clock in the morning, and at midday, and at six o'clock in the evening, and on Sunday before the two services, — the peals of the bell reached the ears of all the people, both in the village and beyond, and it was quite natural that the sound of the ringing often brought the figure of the little bell-ringer before their mind's eye.

"When I heard the deep tones of the Cathedral bell in Utrecht, I somehow never thought of a man doing it. I heard the sound, and that was all. But here, I always see the rope,

and at the foot of the rope little Ilting with his small face and grey hair. And that picture speaks more to me than the bell-ringing itself. I only preach two sermons a week, but that man preaches three times every day!" Walter would say.

And it was the same with all the parishioners. The little man's figure was connected with the ringing of the bell; they saw him as they heard him.

What did he preach about then?

One of the sermons which Ilting delivered by means of his bell, — for he had various ones, — was: "It is God that giveth the power to get wealth."

How could the people know that he was preaching this to the most distant farmer, coming out of his house to watch his labourers; to the most distant peat-worker, going across the water in his scow; and to Soer the shepherd boy, as he was watching the sheep on the moor? He had never told them that there was a hidden meaning in his ringing. And yet they knew it. How was that, then?

It was because the people knew something about him.

It was twenty years ago. At that time Ilting was a man who had never thought of the

fact that it is the Lord who giveth the power to get wealth. Deep down in his heart, there had been a little voice which never ceased saying: "Ilting, you also must become a rich man. Just like Harders, and just like Wemel! You also must possess land and live on a big farm, and sit in the best room with your wife, and drive to town with your son Ruurd on a cart drawn by two horses. Ilting, that is happiness, the greatest happiness a man can have! Come on, man! Why should you not get on, just as well as the others? Are you not just as clever as Harders, and as Wemel? Push forward, man!"

That was at the time about which he had spoken to Walter, at the time when there was no depth in his ringing, when he had forgotten that twenty others had applied for the place which he had got, and when he did not remember that there was a salary connected with the tolling of the bell, a salary which makes hard work light.

He heard that little voice day and night. He could listen to nothing else. He could not even hear the peals of the bell which he himself rang out from the tower. The little voice was far louder; it sounded above the ringing.

Sometimes, after the last peals had died away, he would climb up the tower, first up one ladder, and then up another little one. There was a small trap-door which he could just open. It looked towards the West. The crows and the pigeons which he disturbed in their nests would fly about his head.

"What are you doing here, Ilting?" the crows would shriek. "We shall beat you with our wings, and we shall scratch out your eyes with our beaks! Go away, Ilting! Come, be quick!"

But he was not in a friendly mood then. Why should those crows stand in his way? He wanted to become rich. Did they not want him to attain his goal? And he frightened away the birds with a long stick.

And he would sometimes sit looking out of that trapdoor, with keen eyes, wondering where that piece of land would be when he got that at length. Would it be to the West? What a pity, he often thought, that the churchwardens had never had a trap-door made looking out to the East and on the other sides of the tower as well! Now he was forced always to look out in the same direction. He was never very cheerful when he came down again. And he detested crows ever afterwards.

Still he said: "I shall get my wish; before I am ten years older I shall be rich, in one way or another!" And the time was coming when the little man would try to become rich with all his mind and with all his power and with all his heart, but without God, who gives the power to get wealth.

Ilting had a friend in the schoolmaster, Mr. Boeser.

It is not always the case that the verger and the parish clerk are good friends; but Ilting and the parish clerk, old Master Boeser, were very fond of each other.

In Southloorn on the contrary — the verger and the parish clerk were sworn foes. The two always looked at each other, as if they wanted to say: "Do you also want to serve the church, and do you also want to hold an office in the church?" The precentor also thought: "I cannot understand why the parish thinks it necessary to have a verger at all; they could surely have given me the little extra work, with the pay!" And the verger in his turn thought: "What is the good of that man? He has been done away with in several villages in the North! Now we have an organ we could quite well do without him!"

Ilting and Master Boeser were old friends.



And their friendship had become even greater since the schoolmaster had given up teaching and was living on a pension.

The schoolmaster was not at all conceited! He was not too proud to make a friend of the little vergier. The two grey-headed old men were often seen walking together in the village street or among the cornfields, or sitting at the fireside. The friendship was increased by the fact that even in their most confidential chats Ilting always called the other one "Master," although he had never been taught by him.

"Master," the bell-ringer had said one day, twenty years ago, "it is Saturday, and you are free this afternoon, so why not come out with me? I want to go to the West moor. It is about an hour's walk, but there is time enough."

And the two men, then still in the prime of life, had set out together.

When they had arrived at their destination Ilting said: "Just look round now! I have often seen this sight from the church tower. Do you notice that there are no hills here as on the east side? The country is flat as far as your eye can see. Just think if, in the future, this should all be changed into

meadows, with cattle grazing on them. Can you picture it? Just think of the plovers rising up from among the cows, and in summer hay-waggons being pulled across by strong horses."

The schoolmaster tried to picture the scene. He wondered when it would be.

"And do you see how the ground slopes gently and evenly down towards the river Vecht? You would not require any mills here to keep the ground dry! And it is not too high either, so that it would be moist enough in summer! Do you see that, master?"

The schoolmaster saw it, and looked round with a wise face at everything that Ilting pointed out to him.

"The question to be considered is whether there is a little black earth under the heath. We must look and see, master!"

Boeser understood then why the verger had brought out his spade. He dug out the heather and shoved the spade deep into the ground, until only the wood was seen. He did this many times, until a small space was laid open, where the two men knelt down, bending down like a pair of gold-seekers, letting the earth run between their fingers.

"That black soil is not so bad, master! And it is fairly deep too!"

Later on they tried it in another spot, and afterwards again, a little farther on.

Boeser was feeling very important; he felt like an antiquarian digging up curiosities dating from the time of the Romans. But Ilting made no secret of the fact that it would not affect him in the least if they should find an urn, or anything like that. The verger became more and more excited, and his eyes glistened.

"Now we must find out if here is a clay bank under the sand! Now we shall have to work, master!"

And going back to one of the parts which he had laid open, the man began to dig as fast as he could until at last he was standing up to his hips in a deep hole.

"No clay bank, no clay bank!" he shouted. "Now we must try again, over there!"

Now Boeser took over the spade; and he worked until he was bathed in perspiration. For he was accustomed to use a spade only in his garden, to do the light work that there is to be done in a schoolmaster's garden.

Ilting set to work, and again he exclaimed after a short time: "No clay bank! no clay bank!"

After that the two friends sat down beside the hole on the sand they had dug up.

And it was only then that the verger told the schoolmaster about his great plan, of which he had dreamed for days and weeks.

"Look here," he said, "I mean to buy a few acres of ground here. We shall make it into meadows. We must succeed, old man! I have saved up two hundred guilders; they are on deposit at the notary's. You have some money too, master. Will you help me? I have always wished for some land; it will be our first possession!"

The two friends were very excited for Eastloorn men.

And when they went home, — as it was getting dark, — they had agreed to do a thing that every man in the village, had he known about it, would have advised them not to do. Ilting and Boeser were the very last who could be expected to carry out a scheme of that sort, or to know anything about it.

Next day was a Sunday, so that Ilting could not work out his plan any further. That day seemed very long.

But early on Monday morning he was the

first to appear at the notary's office. The clerk was not even there yet.

"Ilting, my man, there is surely something very important that you are wanting me so early," said Van der Velden, the man who had been long enough in Eastloorn to know every person in the district, and in the surrounding districts.

He, the notary, knew them in a different manner to the minister.

"Do you think you know the people?" he had said one day to Walter, "I know much more about them. He who has not had any financial dealings with people must not think that he knows them."

And Walter had not been able to say much in his own defence. He felt that the man was speaking the truth to a certain extent. He, Walter, was convinced that he weighed the hearts of his farmers fairly accurately, but that man, in his office, laid them on a different scale.

"I suppose you have never had to divide an inheritance?" the notary remarked scornfully, "and I suppose you are still at peace with your relations?" Walter had to admit this reluctantly, although it was a confession of his poverty.



Van der Velden was laying Ilting now on his balance when he asked him innocently what brought him to the office so early.

"Sir," Ilting said, "I want my two hundred guilders that are here on interest."

"What?"

"And then I would like you to make out a deed of sale, saying that I have bought ten acres of Wemel's moor, — you know where that lies, sir, — for that sum."

"Ilting, when did you do that?"

"Early this morning, when Wemel was driving his cart to his clover fields: we have arranged it all."

"You farmers are up early, I must say! When others are still asleep you have already bought and sold half a kingdom! You deserve to get rich...."

In the course of conversation Ilting's whole plan leaked out.

The villagers were accustomed to talk over all their private affairs with the notary as with their best friend. It was a curious fact that some farmers who were reserved with everyone else made a confidant of him. He knew many secrets; one could see that in his face. His eyes seemed to say: "If only you knew how much we know, and what we have

seen sitting in that same chair before you! But we are not going to disclose anything!" The farmers liked him for it. And the slyer the look in his eyes the better the farmers liked him. There was a tacit agreement between the notary and all who had dealings with him that he should be silent and they should trust him. And both sides kept strictly to that compact. "An excellent notary," was the general opinion. And the notary's purse did well through it. He was becoming a rich man.

He promised Ilting to do as he desired, and told him that he could start cultivating the land if he liked.

But when the little man was gone, his wise eyes seemed to say; "Some more news! But silence now! If that plan succeeds I shall buy up Wemel's moor! However did the fellow think of it, the little bell-ringer!"

Things had not gone well with Ilting.

He had dug and delved for many weeks, until he had finished one piece of ground. He had covered it with artificial manure and sown grass seed on it. This was the accepted method in some parts and had been tried with success.

But, although the grass came up very well

the first year, the second year the heather had grown in abundance once more. During those two years and the two which followed the schoolmaster's two hundred guilders were soon spent. The heather certainly had the oldest rights on the soil; who could say how old those rights were? The notary did not buy any of Wemel's moor.

There was a certain amount of joking about the matter in the village, although the people were far too polite to speak to the bell-ringer about it. "Ilting should not have done it," the good ones remarked gently; "if it had been possible, surely Wemel's father would have tried it."

Only Dreese, old Dreese, who was always a little sharp, could not help saying, as they were talking on the Square one evening: "Ilting, you belong to the land-owners now. Ten acres! it is no joke! We shall have to look out for a new bell-ringer soon, for I suppose you will be giving up that job!"

Ilting had not answered a word. And the other men on the Square all thought that Dreese had once more let his tongue run away with him.

"Ilting's moor" that piece of ground was always called after that. For the people had

too much respect for the schoolmaster to call it "Boeser and Ilting's moor."

Ilting, however, could not forget that he had persuaded the schoolmaster to do a foolish thing, and it caused the little man much worry. He felt that he must make good the loss, for Ilting knew it was his fault. But he wondered how long he would have to wait before he could save even a hundred guilders. It was such a large sum.

Their friendship, however, did not suffer from it. That was partly the schoolmaster's doing. He had remarked very magnanimously that in his position he should have been wiser, and that he should have warned the other and kept him from doing it. But, with all his kindness, the master could not keep Ilting from fretting. On the contrary, he worried even more when, some time after, the minister, — it was the old minister, before the Dis-sension, — took for his sermon this text: "But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God; for it is He that giveth thee power to get wealth, that He may establish his covenant which He sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day."

The old minister was full of tact, and he knew exactly how to choose a subject which contained a life's lesson; and it was generally

one which the farmers required more than anything else, those farmers, who always have to work so hard from morning to night. "I must see that they are not altogether engrossed in their work, which might cause them to forget more important things. I must see about that; it is my business," he often thought.

And when the old minister had finished his sermon that morning, Ilting suddenly saw clearly how he had been living for the past weeks and months. "I have not known what happiness is," he said softly, as he sat in the pew near the entrance of the church.

After church he saw Dreese standing outside on the Square, and he thought he knew what the latter was thinking. Wishing to frustrate his sharp remarks, he said humbly: "The minister's words were aimed at me to-day!"

"That is quite possible, my man!" Dreese said mercilessly.

And after that day there was a look on Ilting's face which meant: "I have committed a great sin in buying those ten acres of ground."

The other men tried to cheer him up a little, but they were not very successful.

"It is on account of those two hundred guilders that he looks so miserable," Dreese said, after Ilting had left.



But the others said: "You must not say that, Dreese, — the cause lies deeper than that."

It was in those days that a little depth began to come into Ilting's ringing. All the time a small voice seemed to be whispering to him, as he bent his little body up and down in pulling the rope: "You were on the wrong road, Ilting! You must not wish to be great like Harders and Wemel! Could you not be quite contented and happy with your wife and with your son Ruurd?"

And so it was that, when the people of Eastloorn heard the peals of the bell at certain hours of the day, they always thought of that incident in Ilting's life, and it taught them this lesson: "You must not wish to be great, as Ilting did; be contented, surely that is enough!"

The little bell-ringer was a greater influence in the parish than either he or anyone else knew; he preached to the most distant farmer, as he came out of his house to watch his men; and to the most distant peat-worker, as he crossed the water on his scow; and to Soer, the shepherd boy, as he watched his sheep on the moor.

But a still greater depth was to come into his ringing.

The day would come when his friend, old Boeser, was to *départ* from this earth, before Ilting was able to pay back the two hundred guilders, which the old schoolmaster refused to accept.

The master had been ailing for a considerable time. In the beginning of winter the churchwardens had said: "You must let the new master take over your work, Boeser, and when you get a little stronger, you can do it yourself again." They said this, although they knew only too well that there was not much chance of it.

But they could not induce Boeser to give in. "How can I do that?" he had remarked to Ilting that same afternoon, and Ilting was of the same opinion.

One Sunday, a few months later, the churchwardens had said to the verger: "Look here, Ilting, your friend is failing fast!"

Ilting liked them to say "Your friend," and he was proud of it. He wondered what else they were going to say.

"And now we thought perhaps you might be able to persuade him. You have a certain amount of influence over him."

That remark hurt Ilting, for he remembered the purchase of the ten acres of ground, when

he had also been able to influence the master. But he listened to what they had to say.

"Perhaps you could induce him to allow the new master to do the reading in the meantime! You know as well as we do, Ilting, that the old man can scarcely walk to church any more."

This also hurt Ilting. He wondered whether the churchwardens did not know what it feels like for a man to allow others to do his good work! He did not answer.

"And then, Ilting, you understand, of course, that it will have to be sooner or later. The master can scarcely see any more. Some people say that he is almost blind; one can notice it, as he turns over the leaves of the Bible; he almost touches the page with his face to see whether he is right. It is wonderful how well he manages. When he has found the place then he seems to see quite well, and need not hold his face so close to the book."

The verger did not say that he thought the reason of this was that the master was so well versed in the Bible, after having read it at home and in church for sixty years!

"So we hope you understand what we mean, Ilting," the churchwardens continued. "It is not that we are tired of the master, but it is

for his own good that we should wish him to resign."

It was only then that Ilting spoke, and his voice trembled as he said: "Does the master not read well enough?"

And the churchwardens knew that they could not count upon any help from that quarter.

Ilting, however, was not satisfied. "I must find out how blind the master really is," he thought; "next Sunday I shall know."

When on the following Sunday the master was going to start reading, and the whole congregation was looking up at him with much reverence, Ilting, sitting in his distant pew by the door, noticed how much trouble his friend seemed to have in finding the right page. He had been told to read the Ninetieth Psalm, and, after a considerable time had passed, he had evidently found it. He began to read: "A Prayer of Moses the man of God. Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God!"

"Now we can all see how well the master still reads," Ilting thought. "The churchwardens may say what they like about it. That man

blind! Surely he would hesitate then! But afterwards I shall know for certain!"

And when the old man had read the last verse, as far as the minister had told him to go, namely, the twelfth verse: "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom!" Ilting said to himself: "Now I must look carefully whether or not the master turns over the leaf. I hope he will not; then I shall know, afterwards!"

The verger was far from attentive during that service. He kept on gazing at the master to see whether he would leave the Bible as it was. And he became more and more elated as the service drew to a close that the Bible was open at the Ninetieth Psalm.

As soon as the service was over, and even before all the people had left the church, Ilting hastened to the precentor's desk. The old schoolmaster had been led away gently by his wife.

Then Ilting bent his head over the Bible, and he looked, and... the Bible was open at the Books of the Prophets! "Ezekiel" Ilting read with incredulous eyes.

It was clear now; the master was blind, really blind.

And all that turning over the leaves had



only been a dodge to lead the people to believe that he could see fairly well still, so that they might let him remain the parish clerk.

Ilting did not tell anyone about it. But it was no longer necessary; for in that same week the master became very ill, and on the following Sunday the new schoolmaster was in the old man's place.

Who could tell for how many Sundays Master Boeser had read his chapter by heart?

When the story came out afterwards, the people of Eastloorn were proud that the knowledge of the Scriptures was so great in the village as had been proved by the master. "Just let the schoolmaster of Southloorn try to do that!" Ilting said.

But since then the bell-ringer was a very lonely man, and a great sadness crept into his heart; as if he felt that his last days could not be very far off either. And always the last words which he had heard his beloved friend speak seemed to sound in his ears, those words which he had read with blind eyes: "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."

He thought of it as he tugged at the bell-rope in the church tower, and the new sermon which now rang out over all the parish was

that the people should give more thought to their latter end. And sometimes that sermon was understood; often it was understood by the people, as they stood among the cornfields in the hot sun, holding their sickles; and sometimes, also, it was understood by someone lying ill in bed, as the peals of the bell reached his ears through rickety windows and badly fitting doors.

And in this way a little more depth came into Ilting's ringing.

But, a little later, something else happened which made Ilting even better. It took place a few years before the great drought.

He had one son, an only child. Ruurd was born when the parents had almost given up hope of ever having a child. He had grown into a sturdy lad; had gone to school at Master Boeser's, and afterwards worked with one of the farmers. He was as good a labourer as one could possibly find.

And Ruurd had cast an eye on one of the village girls. This was golden-haired Reeze, who was liked by all in the village; and Ruurd's parents were very pleased with his choice.

For they had thought at one time that their son was not thinking of marrying. It was not

that he did not like to mix with the girls; but when his parents talked about marriage he would laugh, and make a joke of it.

"He will never do it!" Ilting sometimes said to his wife.

And she would answer: "They like them all nowadays, that's the worst of it! In our day we liked only one, and we married that one. The boys and girls are quite different nowadays."

So his parents were pleasantly surprised when Ruurd told them about golden-haired Reeze. And, as they sat together by the fire in their little room, they built castles in the air, such as they had never dreamed of building before.

One evening Ruurd and Reeze had gone for a walk on the lonely dyke by the side of the Vecht. And they had met Joop, the son of Ake, crazy Ake. And Reeze had clung very close to Ruurd as the men passed and wished each other good evening.

"Ruurd," she said, when Joop was far off, "help me against that man! I am so frightened, Ruurd! Yesterday he stopped me as I came back from milking the cows, and he said that I must give you up and belong to him! I wanted to run away, but he held me by my arm until I began to scream! I hate him,

Ruurd! And I am so frightened! He is a worse man than any in the parish; you surely know about Seine, whose child has no father!"

The next day the two men had come across each other again in Dieters' little oak-wood, and Ruurd had grinned at Joop recklessly, as if he wanted to say: "You have come too late, my man! The girl belongs to me! She does not want to have anything to do with you!"

Joop had understood that grin perfectly, and in passing he had turned round suddenly and had said, as some one who is controlling his anger: "Look here, Ruurd, I shall let you have the girl. It is the first time I have been honestly fond of a girl, and she shall not be made miserable by me! You can have her, but I tell you, man, do not laugh at me again, I could not stand it!" And, saying this, he had walked off.

And yet, a day later, Ruurd had grinned at him again, recklessly. It happened at Iken's buckwheat field. And there Ruurd's dead body was found, with six or seven deep cuts of a knife in his breast and his side, and great gashes in his face. The buckwheat flowers on that spot had been trampled down, and were red with blood.

During that week someone else had rung the bell for Ilting, and also when the funeral took place. It seemed strange to Ilting to hear the peals of the bell on his road to the churchyard. He had never heard the bell rung before; it was an unknown sound to him, coming as it did from the tower, and from one side, instead of from above. In the churchyard he kept on thinking of that sound; he could scarcely concentrate his thoughts on what was taking place. And the minister was astonished to hear Ilting's answer when he said: "Come, Ilting, I will give you my arm. We must go home; it is finished." The minister was astonished to hear his answer: "Do the other people hear the ringing of the bell as I do?" The minister thought that the man had gone mad with grief.

During those days, while someone else did his work, he asked many people: "Why have the churchwardens had another bell hung in the tower? The old one was good enough, surely. I cannot understand the churchwardens!" And so it was quite natural that some people thought as the minister did.

But the madness passed off when, a week later, he started ringing the church bell again. From that day he was cured of his strange



sayings. And the people on the Square said of the doctor, who had given him some medicine during that week: "We have a clever doctor! Just let the doctor in Southloorn cure anyone of madness, and that in a fortnight!"

And that was the great sorrow in Ilting's life, a sorrow such as he had never known before.

And ever afterwards, the people, as they heard the peals of the bell, could not help thinking of the man standing at the rope. And, as they thought of him, while the bell rang forth, they often said to themselves: "Quite true, Ilting, life is difficult, and we must often give up even our greatest treasure upon earth. That is why He has said: 'Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, but treasures in heaven!' I shall remember, Ilting!" Many people thought in this way, as they stood among the cornfields in the blazing sun, with a sickle in their hands; or others, as they lay ill in bed and as the sound of the bell came towards them through rickety windows and badly fitting doors.

And when Walter heard the story later, and understood, he knew what Ilting had meant when he had once said, as he stood cap in hand in the study door, that only by a great

sorrow could there be depth, either in a sermon or in the ringing of a church bell. And once more Walter wished, like a brave man, that the great sorrow might come to him soon. For he hoped with all his heart to be a good minister.

Wiegen, the Dreamer, was very fond of Ilting. He would have liked to become Ilting's friend, to have occupied the empty place left by Boeser. But he knew he could never fill that place; for Boeser was the schoolmaster, and he had once been a poor shepherd boy, who had only just escaped growing up the wrong way.

"Go on ringing, Ilting, go on ringing," he said to himself, as the bell pealed forth; "for you are ringing in the Kingdom — that is certain!"

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## VIII

### GOESTING, THE DEACON

Dreese was one of those who often came to have a chat with Goesting.

It was a curious friendship, for the two men were very different.

Goesting had left the Reformed Church, and Dreese had not. "Dreese is not the type of man for us, really," the Dissenters often said. "We cannot understand, Goesting, why he always comes to you. We are never sure whether he means a thing or not; you know as well as we do, Goesting, that he almost always scoffs at everything!"

"Or rather, that he scoffs at almost everything," they corrected themselves, for they felt that the first way of putting it was a little too bad.

"Dreese is a deep-thinking man, though," Goesting answered the other elders. "He means well, but one must know him.

He always expresses himself differently to what he means; and if one only remembers that, it is quite easy to understand him!"

"We believe it is your kind-heartedness, Goesting, which makes you bear with that man; for you are the only one who puts up with his sneering words!"

But the elder did not enlighten them as to what it was which made him look upon Dreese as a friend, although he belonged to the Reformed Church; also there was much between them of which no one else knew.

"You look after the poor of the parish," Dreese sometimes said, when he came in the evening, when his work was over for the day, and he had walked the long distance from his house to Goesting's farm, "The Haandrik." "Goesting, there is more work for you to do! Kleijsing's wife has had bread from the baker for the last three weeks without paying for it. Mrs. Goestel told me so herself; and you know quite well that those Kleijsings are quite deserving; there is real poverty there! If only they belonged to our Church I should know what to do, but they belong to yours! So there is something for you to do! They must be helped!"

A remark like that was not pleasant for any Dissenting man who might be sitting at Goesting's hearth to hear. "That is just like Dreese," he would think, "always finding fault! As if we do not look after our poor! Why otherwise does he say it? He is just sneering at our Church!"

But Goesting was glad if Dreese gave him a hint occasionally. "It is a good thing you have told me that, Dreese!" he would say with great satisfaction, as he took one of the large blocks of wood and threw it on the fire. "I must look into that to-morrow! Yes, that is like those Kleijsings: they will never own up that they are hungry, and suffer it all uncomplainingly!"

"Yesterday we all suffered hunger in our church!" Dreese said, with the laugh that people did not care for. "Mr. Rechtman took the service for our minister, who had gone home, I heard from his housekeeper. That Rechtman kept us there for quite two hours and a half, and when we went home we were hungry, I can tell you! It was past twelve o'clock!"

"Yes, one gets hungry when the minister preaches a long sermon," the third man, who sat by the fire, would say kindly, and Dreese



would be 'delighted that he had taken him in once more.

"That is a sign that you Dissenters only suffer physical hunger, and you know nothing of hunger of the soul. You are no better than we are then. Your Church is better than you!" Dreese would say with a grin, and the third man could not be called his friend for at least six weeks.

"Now you must understand, Goesting," Dreese went on, "that Rechtman is unctuous enough; it is not that. Unctuousness is like the butter on bread; and who does not like butter on his bread? Our minister has not got it, or your Senserff either. Ah, they have not learned the art yet, and many a call it will cost those two men! Why do they not learn it from him?"

The third man at the fire was taken in again; for he took Senserff's part, and protested hotly that Senserff was an excellent minister. Dreese might say what he liked, but when he came away after having heard Senserff's sermon, he always felt that he had heard the words of a holy man.

"You do not understand it, man," Dreese said, and the flames of the large block of wood lit up his eyes in a wonderful way. "Rechtman

is the man! Have you never heard him? Well, the art of preaching a really unctuous sermon consists in casting one's eyes sometimes upwards, then to the right or left! It consists in a twist of the voice, sometimes a tremble, sometimes a shout, and occasionally a long drawl. And then the smile, man, the smile, which must light up one's face during the whole sermon, as if one were saying: 'Do you see how happy I am to be here in your church?' When will Senserff and Walter learn that? Never, I think; they are not the men for it!"

The third man wished to say something to defend his minister, for he was being taken in all the time. But it was impossible, as Dreese would not stop.

"Why do the professors not make a point of teaching their pupils that manner when they are studying? I have met a professor who was like that. That was when I went to town one day. I wanted a horse, and stayed there for the Sunday. If you come to think of it, it is quite easily understood; a man's natural voice is a sinful voice; everything in nature is sinful, so the natural voice must be sinful too; that is why the ministers should give up their natural voice and cultivate an unna-

tural voice! Your eyes, in their natural state, are also sinful; that is why a true minister must cultivate unnatural eyes. And the same can be said of the whole face! The expression of every man's face must of necessity be sinful, man, sinful! And that is why a man must alter his expression, until it is no longer natural! Do you understand it or not?"

Goesting did not answer, but he understood it all quite well. "How Dreese can talk!" he thought; "it is quite evident that he has bottled up all his anger about Rechtman, and now he is just letting his tongue go!" But the third man was quite at sea. Why should Senserff not be a good minister because he was too natural in his words, bearing and gestures?

"I cannot understand, though," he grumbled, "why you go to Walter's church at all! If he does not please you, then why do you go?"

"I will tell you," Dreese answered. "I am but a natural man myself, and that is why I go to Walter's church. As soon as I get rid of my sinful nature, and that will surely happen some day, I promise you, I shall go and hear Rechtman, even if I should have to walk from here to Southloorn every Sunday!"

And in the following week it was said in the village that Dreese was not pleased with his minister, and a week later there was a rumour that he went to Southloom, to Rechtman's church. The third man had started the report and the rest had been added later on. It was also said that it would not be long before Dreese joined the Dissenting Church. "Preserve us from that!" the Dissenters were heard to say.

It was curious that Goesting always understood him; for Goesting was not particularly clever. Goesting himself thought it was because he saw so much of him.

"But, talking about hunger," Dreese continued, "that Rechtman knows exactly how to arouse it. Our poor sinful souls say to the man in the pulpit: 'Come now, give us what we ask for; you know what we mean!' And a stupid minister will say: 'Right you are, I will give it you here!' But Rechtman has a way of giving you a peep into Heaven, and whenever your desire to enter has been roused he says: 'No, you cannot go in there!' And he will prove it to you with his dogmas. He makes you long for salvation, and then, if you want to grasp it, suddenly says: 'No, that is not for you!' You begin to long for it

more and more; you are starving with hunger, and parched with thirst; and just as you think: now I can drink from that spring and eat the dates in that oasis, then he suddenly appears at the spring and among the trees, and sends you away in the name of the Lord! That is the real thing, man! It must not be made too easy for us sinners; we have not deserved it! We must first suffer hunger and thirst, and then our longing for eternal bliss will be much greater! That is what he once said to Walter, who told me. And I said to Walter that I thought Rechtman was in the right, and that he, Walter, made it all seem too easy!"

"I suppose your minister was furious when you said that?" the third man remarked.

"Not at all; he laughed heartily when I said it," Dreese said, and the flames made his eyes sparkle. Goesting was constantly putting new blocks of wood on the fire, so that it blazed high up.

Goesting was laughing in his sleeve; "Dreese is a queer fellow," he thought, "but he is right! I understand him quite well!"

The third man, however, did not understand him at all.

Dreese had not nearly finished; for a two-



and-a-half hours' sermon had given him much food for thought, and it would be some time before he had put it all into words. "No, no," he went on, "the Southloorn people are better off than we are! Have you ever watched Rechtman, when he comes down from the pulpit? He smiles to right and left, and shakes hands with anyone who happens to be near him; he even shook hands with those two old women, Fenne and Snippe, who sit right in front because they are so deaf. 'Why does he do that?' Fenne shouted into Snippe's ear, so that everyone could hear it, for if she does not shout the other one cannot understand. Snippe laughed in a malicious way; those two old women are so unamiable, and they think they can look into everyone's soul. And there were several members of the congregation who laughed in a disrespectful manner. But when we were outside on the Square I said to Wemel, and to some others who were listening: 'Look at that now, Wemel, our ministers are not like that! Are they friendly when they come down from the pulpit? Do they smile and shake hands?' Neither of them does that. For what reason is Absalom given us as an example in the Scriptures if we are not meant to follow it? Did Absalom not steal the hearts

of the men of Israel in this manner, while his father David was stern and unyielding? It served him right that his subjects forsook David and gave the kingdom to Absalom! I can never make out why he came to such a sad end in that tree; for kindness ought to be rewarded surely! I hope the world will be more just towards Rechtman, and that all the calls of the Reformed Church will be for him! Have you noticed that Rechtman's hair is long too? That is vanity, one of our men said yesterday; but it is not so, it is the fate of all Absaloms to have long hair!"

"Rechtman had a call about three weeks ago," the third man remarked, "I am beginning to think you are quite right, for neither of our two ministers has had a call yet."

"I am glad you are beginning to see it! A minister must do his best to get on, and if he never gets a call it's a sign that he is not doing well. They must get themselves talked about or they will never be noticed. Shall I tell you what Rechtman did the other day? He was taking the service in a certain village in Guelders, and, when he was mounting the pulpit, he knelt down on the bottom step with his face on one of the following steps, and remained in that attitude for at

least a quarter of an hour, so that everyone might see what a great sinner he felt himself to be, and how unworthy to preach the Gospel. He did not get that call; evidently the people there were not able to appreciate such an action, but he got himself talked about, all the same. Why do our ministers not do things like that? Is it not a pastor's first duty to set us the example of humility and penitence? I believe Walter and Senserff are still too proud; they are not as they should be yet. Some ministers attract the public attention by becoming Socialists, Walter says; and others by opposing the Socialists. Again others pretend to be martyrs to our modern system of committees, or by setting on foot new institutions which never last for more than six weeks. Walter says that they call together great meetings in Amsterdam, to which they invite people from all parts of the country. They accomplish nothing, because they generally withdraw their own proposals, sometimes even during the meeting itself. But that does not matter; they get talked about, every one hears about them, and their fame is spread throughout the country. Walter told me the other day that he heard one minister say to another in rather an angry tone: 'You do

not believe in your own proposals!' to which the other one answered: 'That is not necessary either, if only the people believe in them! That is what I call working for the Church! When do our ministers ever do such things? They just plod on here, — never go anywhere else, never raise their voices in the streets. They will spend their lives here in visiting the sick, and preparing the children for their confirmations, and they will die and be buried here, and our country will never know that Walter and Senserff have existed! A minister who does not get talked about deserves to live and die in that way! Do you not think so too, Goesting?'

"Well, I must say that is put rather too strongly, my man. I have never heard much about these matters." Goesting answered with his kind smile, the smile of a man who cannot see any harm in the world, because there is no harm in his own heart.

"How could you hear about these things, here on the moor: your whole world is centred round your farm!"

Dreese would sometimes sit and talk in that way for an hour or more in the evening, but the third man, whoever he might be, generally left long before Dreese got up to go. And

he invariably went away with a very uncomfortable feeling, because he had failed to understand Dreese's ideas; and in that feeling he represented the greater part of the community.

Only Goesting, who never said much himself, generally listened, and his wife liked Dreese, and when he went away they always said: "Come as often as you like, Dreese, we understand you. And you are quite right, it sometimes makes us sad too!"

As he was going out at the back-door, Dreese said: "You must help those Kleijsings, of course, but I know you have quite enough to do with your poor people; here are ten guilders to pay their debt at the baker's and to give them a week's bread into the bargain; but do not tell any one please! I do not want to make any difference between your poor and our own."

This was one of the secrets which existed between the two men, and because it was a secret Goesting's defence was always very weak when he took Dreese's part to the elders.

As Dreese walked away from the farm and down by the moorland path, the path along which Wine and Wiegen had once made their



way also, past the gnarled oak tree, he felt very cheerful, in spite of the darkness which surrounded him. He felt a different man after his conversation with Goesting.

Dreese was a man who could not stand affectation, above all not in a minister, but he always felt much better after he had relieved his mind by talking to Goesting, the man in whose ear he could pour all his grievances, and it never did him any harm.

What would Dreese have done without Goesting?

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There were more people who could not well have done without Goesting, although his farm was far away, an hour's walk from the village.

One of these people was Senserff, Goesting's own minister, the poor widower, who could not forget his wife.

"I feel I must have another talk with you," he said one day, and the expression on his face was far from cheerful.

"That is right, sir," Goesting said. And they sat down together on the bench in front of the house under the flowering apple trees. It was a wonderful spring; few people in Eastloorn could remember such a beautiful one.

Senserff looked up at the branches, with their pink and white blossoms. He stretched out his hand and brought one of them close to his face, carefully, without breaking it, delighting in its sweet fragrance. Then he let go the branch, which flew back with a jerk.

All those blossoms could not prevent the sun from shedding its gentle rays on the wooden bench, but the little leaves, which were already budding, said: "Just wait until we grow a little; then you will not be able to shine on the bench; then we shall make it a shady corner for Goesting and his wife to sit."

"Oh, only in midsummer," the sun answered; "but then I shall be so much older and stronger myself. Do you think that only you grow? We shall see, we shall see!"

And the blossoms and the little leaves laughed softly, as children at school do, when they nudge each other with their elbows so that the teacher shall not notice it.

Not only the blossoms and the sunshine, but Goesting also laughed as he sat on the bench, and he did not even have to alter his face for that. The expression on his face was always kind and happy.

A crow hopped across the garden path. It was a tame one, and had been on the farm

for three years. No one knew how it had come there. Goesting had found it among a bed of peas when it was very young and had almost no feathers. He had picked it up and reared it on bread and worms, and afterwards he had shortened its wing-feathers. And so the crow hopped about, as if the farm belonged to it. It had even made friends with the cat, which had been a great difficulty at first.

It came hopping along towards the bench, picking up some sand on the way, perched itself on the path, and looked at the two men with its head on one side. It knew the minister quite well, and all the other people who came to the farm, but that head on one side meant: "Why are you here again? Why can you not leave Goesting and me alone? Every one seems to think that this is their home too, and that is not the case at all!"

"Look," said Senserff, producing his pocket book. "I have not shown you this yet, — my wife. My father-in-law has had smaller photographs taken from the large one which I have in my study."

Goesting took the picture in his hand, without saying anything. What could he say? For one moment a dark shadow seemed to

glide across the old man's face. Were the little leaves growing too strong for the spring sun? Where they casting that shadow on Goesting's face?

"You are loosing already," the little leaves said to the sun; "do you see the shadow on Goesting's face?"

"You are altogether mistaken," the sun answered; "it is only because the old man is sorry for his minister. Did you think that was your doing?"

Senserff had also noticed it. So it was not necessary for Goesting to say anything. Senserff had also noticed with what reverence those old hands held the photograph, as if it had to be handled very gently. "How rough we are," those hands seemed to say "how can the minister give us that pretty little face to hold."

"Do you not think it a good likeness?" Senserff said. "We had that large photograph taken when I was working for my examination in Utrecht. She had come over suddenly, without letting me know beforehand. She stood on the threshold, holding the knob of the door — 'Are you supposed to be working for your examination?' she said laughingly, without coming in. I must tell you that my

room was full of students; they used to come running in and out a great deal, but how could I help it? They were always so kind and good-natured, those boys! On this occasion one was lying on the sofa, another on two chairs, and a third was sitting with his legs across the window still. It was a nice sight for a young girl. But in an instant they were all up. An officer could not have made his soldiers stand at attention any sooner. We were all a little confused, for you know the impression a young girl makes standing on the threshold of a room full of young men who live good and moral lives. The cigar ends flew out of the window. There was one queer customer among them though, a fellow whom one could not help liking, in spite of his faults. 'Out of the way, all of you!' he shouted, 'make room for the embrace!' And amidst wild shouts of laughter which filled the room, I had to make my way to the door between a double file of young men. The girl stood there with a blush of shame on her cheeks, with sparkling eyes which seemed to implore me: 'Please do not kiss me now, I beseech you!' — It was on that day, Goesting, that the photograph was taken. Why did she come without letting me know?"



"Do you see that I am winning;" the spring sun cried; "look at the sunshine on the minister's face and on Goesting's face! See how they both smile! I am stronger than you!"

But the little leaves, which were trying hard to unfold themselves, answered: "Do you not see that it is only the memory of happier days which is making that young man look so cheerful? It is not your doing, sun! Please do not imagine it!"

And the crow was standing on the garden path, quite close to the bench, with its head on one side, as if it were saying: "What is that the minister is talking about? Is it about young girls? It is a good thing the other elders and their wives do not know about that, or they would refuse to go to his Church! They all seem to come to Goesting with their worries! I cannot understand it at all!"

"Will you believe it, Goesting, it was touch and go that we never had these small photographs," Senserff said musingly. "As I told you, these small ones were taken from the large one which I have in my study. That large one is the only copy we have, and it was almost destroyed once. How could I ever

do without it? Just fancy! one day I was sitting at my writing table; and I was working hard at some papers which I had to send up to "Classis" when my wife came in and sat down on the arm of my chair and glanced at the papers. 'You cannot understand anything of that, inquisitive little woman,' I said; 'you can look at it if you like; it is Greek. But not as Grecian as your nose!' I tried to joke with her; I knew that she was undergoing a fierce mental conflict, for at first she did not want to take part in the Dissension. 'Oh, please stop trying to joke,' she said, 'it is not possible to-day. Tell me, — and then I found out what she was worrying about, — 'tell me, when you and your elders have got the length of refusing to obey the Synod, then will you have to preach in another church, and will you not be allowed in this pulpit?' 'That remains to be seen,' I answered; 'perhaps we shall be allowed to keep our buildings, and then we shall not be forced to build a new church.' — 'I should like that,' she said thoughtfully, and then — 'Shall we have to leave this house too?' — 'I sincerely hope not, but we must be prepared for that, prepared for all sacrifices.' — 'I should like so much to stay here,' she said. — 'So should

I, but he who takes one step in the right direction, must be prepared to take the second one too,' I answered, 'And what does it matter? We can easily get another house in the village, and we shall be just as happy there!' — And I went on talking on the subject of self-sacrifice for the sake of a good cause, in this case the emancipation of the poor Church. I was a little harsh in my words, for I believed the time had come. Are not the ways of God's children, ways where their own blood must flow out of many wounds? And still she was thinking. — 'And shall we be poor then? Will your stipend be stopped? You know Father has nothing, and neither have you!' — 'Oh, that will not matter,' I said laughingly, 'I have always had ascetic tendencies!' And I went on talking about the courage which true believers must have, a courage which will help them to make a stand against the devil. I was going to get up from my chair, filled with enthusiasm, when suddenly my little wife burst into tears and hid her face on my shoulder. 'I cannot leave this house, where I have been so ideally happy!' she sobbed. 'I do not want to see you in another pulpit; it is here I felt proud of you for the first time! I do

not want to be poor, and live in one of those dark rooms that the farmers live in! I do not want my baby to be born in one of those dismal rooms in the village. I will not, I will not!' And she sobbed with her arms round my neck and implored me, and would not let me go in her misery. And then I talked to her for an hour or more, Goesting. It was the fiercest struggle I ever had in my life; for afterwards when she died, Goesting, it was far less difficult; it was an altogether different sorrow. But at last, at last I had conquered. The sobbing stopped, she lifted up her head, her large eyes looked up at me again, her lips were smiling. — 'Does God wish it?' she said; 'then it must be'. And I had never before loved her as I did then. The evening fell and still she sat beside me at my desk. The stars shed their soft light into the room; I laughed and I teased her; I was as happy as a king. — 'I have always idolised you,' I said, 'you are my goddess who makes my path of life beautiful, and my goddess you shall stay. I shall bring sacrifices to you, you who can make sacrifices!' — And then, then it happened. — We heard something fall from the wall and down to the floor, with the sound of glass breaking

into a thousand pieces. — 'My photograph!' she cried. — And when I lit the lamp, we saw the broken bits of the frame on the floor. I stood gazing at it in despair. 'That is how you get punished for your idolatry!' she said with a laugh; 'you had better not call me a goddess again; a nice end to your love-making!' The picture itself was fortunately in perfect condition. What should I do now, if I had not got it to look at every day?"

During this conversation, the crow had hopped under the bench, between Goesting's legs and back again, stood for a moment, looking up at him evidently undecided as to which course to take, then hopped on to Goesting's knees, pecking at the feathers under its wings and smoothing them down. Occasionally Goesting stroked its head gently.

Goesting scarcely spoke all the afternoon. What could he say?

But when Senserff rose to go, there was one more man who felt lighter at heart after putting his troubles into words, one more man who went his way with a happier face. — "You must come again, sir," the old man said, "you must come again."

And long after the minister had gone up the road towards the village, the little leaves



of the apple trees near the bench quarrelled with the sun, as to who had won, the leaves with their shade, or the sunshine. But the sun shone cheerfully until the evening fell, for, judging by the minister's face as he left, the rays of sunshine had certainly won the day.

But the crow had its own thoughts on the subject. It sat perched on the rim of the rain tank near the wall, and looked wisely at the trees and at the sun. "Still they quarrel," the crow thought scornfully; "and they do not know that it was Goesting who did it. They have nothing to do with the minister's happier face: Goesting did it! But how could they possibly know that? They do not mix with the people as I do!"

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Jens, Kedde's wife, also came to see Goesting frequently.

Jens and Kedde were among those who received parochial relief. They lived in the village at the end of a back street. It was a disagreeable part of the village to live in; the narrow street was full of rubbish and mud and broken bits of glass; any one who wished to reach one of the little houses was forced to take long steps, in order to avoid

putting his feet into all that dirt. But Jens and Kedde could not help that; they kept their little house and also themselves and their children clean and tidy. Besides what she received from the poor fund of the Church, Jens was allowed to come to Goesting's farm occasionally, to hear whether his wife had anything to give to the children.

And when she came, she often found him in his cornfields, which lay near the orchard in front of his house.

"Go in," Goesting would say; "my wife knows you are coming, and I think she has something for you."

But Jens would not do that, for she was very fond of a chat, so she remained standing near the corn-field and always had a good deal to say for herself; and while she talked, Goesting remained standing too; for he must be polite, even to a poor woman. He could not have brought himself to say: "Oh, for goodness' sake, stop and go away!" And the kindly smile on his face kept the woman from knowing that he was too busy really to listen to her chatter.

"Listen, Goesting," she said, and she picked at the long ears of corn which reached almost to her shoulders; "listen, Goesting," and the

story which followed was never very short. It was generally about the children, who were getting on so well at school. Goesting had never had children himself, yet it did not tire him to hear about them. All he did on such an occasion was to move out of the sun and to go and stand in the shade of the high elms; then he would light his pipe, as he was forced to be idle at any rate. But that smoking made Jens forget altogether that she should not stand talking too long to a farmer on a summer afternoon.

"And then I must tell you this," she would say as she picked one of the blue cornflowers which grew in thousands among the golden corn. And she would start talking about Kedde himself, — Kedde who was so stupid that she had always to push him on and tell him what to do. She could not understand how a man could be so stupid; it was a good thing he had her to look after him. But he was good, and she had never shed a tear about him during all the years of their married life, and very few women living in her back street could say the same about their husbands.

"You must not stand picking at those ears of corn," Goesting sometimes ventured to say; "it is our food." This unusual reproof, coming

from a man who was even more gentle than Kedde, almost frightened the woman.

A loud burst of laughter rose up from the corn, and the heads bent close together and shook and rippled. "Will Goesting eat us? Nonsense, Jens, it is not true! Every year we stand here, and grow as well as we can, and we allow ourselves to be cut, and afterwards we are threshed over there in the barn. But he does not eat us, nor does his wife; at least, their share is not worth speaking of! What good is a huge corn-field like this to two old people? No, shall we tell you what happens, Jens? You get it in the winter, you and your children eat it all up; we are given away to you and the other poor by bushels; it is all given away. And he always pretends that it is not true, and that he finishes it all himself! He is a good hypocrite, that Goesting! Surely we know better than any one else. Oh, Goesting, Goesting!" And the corn laughed and rippled and bent over to Jens, who stood there with her hands under her apron; and the ears of corn which were nearest her bent their heads over into her apron, as if they were saying: "Go on, Jens, pick us now and cover us up with your apron; that is where we must end in any case!"

The woman understood all the corn said to her, and she laughed with the corn, and away in a corner, in the shade of the elm trees, stood Goesting, and he laughed too.

Was there ever a man in Eastloorn who spread cheerfulness about him as he did, and that without saying a word, just by being silent?

And many people came to "the Haandrik," although it was far from the village, and although the walk on a stormy autumn evening or a dark winter night could not be pleasant. They came, and they brought their troubles and their sorrows with them, and they went homewards without those cares, and difficulties, and troubles.

Sometimes the doctor would come, even though there was no one ill at the farm; for that poor doctor had a very disagreeable wife!

Harders had been there at the time when he had sent Jade away, and when he could tell no one but Goesting that he was not at peace with himself about it.

Joop had been driven there on one occasion, with a vague longing to be good and turn over a new leaf, and he had offered his services; and Goesting had actually promised



to take him at Easter, that being the time of year when the farmers exchanged their men. But, when Easter was there, Joop's longing to be good was a thing of the past, and he was being tossed about on that stormy sea, where his ship seemed always to be until it should be thrown to bits against a rock.

Ilting, the bell-ringer, had been there, at the time when, as he thought himself, he had cheated the schoolmaster out of two hundred guilders.

Walter, the minister, had been there, although Goesting belonged to the other Church; it was said that Walter had tried to get him to come back to the Reformed Church.

"Walter must not do that!" the Dissenters had remarked. "Why not?" the Reformed answered. "If we can get him back, Walter will have done a good deed!" Wiegen, the Dreamer, had laughed at this, and said: "What does it matter to which party he belongs? He is one of the Kingdom, in any case!" But no one ever found out why it was that Walter came to the "Haandrik," for Goesting could be very silent! Only the tame crow knew, the tame crow which sat on his knee, pecking its feathers, while Goesting stroked its black head with his rough hand. "I should not have imagined

that that cheerful Walter could have such deep sorrows," the crow said.

Everyone came to the "Haandrik," everyone came! And it was wonderful how much they all had to talk about, although Goesting said so very little himself. Ah, why should he talk, when all those other people had so much to say? For must there not always be one who listens?

Oh, good Goesting, go on living in this manner for the few years which you still have to live!

But Eastloorn will not be the same place when you are no longer there. How will Dreese do without you? Which of the others will know and understand that righteous man as you do, and who will listen to him for hours at a time, when he is holding forth in his sneering way, which he cannot really help, because he has been given a sharper eyesight than his neighbours? How will Senserff do without you, Senserff, who will never talk about his dead wife to anyone but you, because he considers that only very holy ears are fit to hear these things? And how will everyone do without you, when you are no more there?

Oh, good Goesting, go on living in this

manner the few years which you still have to live. But the "Haandrik" also will be a different place when you are gone! For how will the flowering apple trees near the bench do without you, and the sunbeams which shine through the leaves? And what will the corn do? And the crow? For they cannot really talk, those apple blossoms, and those sunbeams, and that crow, and that corn! They all know that quite well! They only talked and laughed as long as you were with them; you made them do it. Oh, Goesting, when you are no more there, then those trees and birds and plants will be like all the trees and birds and plants in all the other farms and gardens in Eastloorn!

## IX

### EDO

Walter had overtaken Wiegen, the Dreamer, as they were both walking on the main road. Walter always took very long steps, and the usual way for anyone in Eastloorn to walk was that of a person who is not pressed for time. So Walter was very soon walking beside Wiegen, and the two men fell into step together.

"This is a fine open country, Wiegen!" the minister said. "Look at those high walls of white sand; it is as if we are walking on the downs. And just look at those pine trees, hanging over the downs, as if they were curious to see what is happening on the road; how beautiful that dark green looks against the white sand! I never knew I should like this place so much when I accepted the call to your parish! And just look straight ahead, and see how the road slopes gently towards the

flat country, near Wemel's old birches. What a wide view one has from this point!"

"Sir, you talk as if the weather were fine," Wiegen answered, "and as if it were not raining. Do you not feel the rain, sir, and do you not mind getting wet?"

"Of course I know it is raining, and I am getting wet too! But what does it matter? Few people who live in a town know the beauty of the country in rainy weather. True, in town it rains quite differently to what it does here. In town one is a man in the rain, a man with fine clothes on, which are spoiled if they get wet; here, in the country, one is like a tree which rejoices in getting wet, and gets new life from the raindrops without which it could not live. Let it rain; it is nice, nice, without the trouble of holding up an umbrella until one's arm is aching. I am a tree, Wiegen, a tree, and I am as much in my element in the rain as in sunshine."

"I see you have followed our custom, sir, in not using an umbrella; we use one only at a funeral, and I really cannot tell why we do it then. I think it is to look more solemn than otherwise, for even in fine weather we always carry an umbrella at a funeral."

As Walter walked, joyful and strong, his



eyes seemed to be full of the sunshine which was wanting in nature. It was a ridiculous idea, of course, but he almost thought he would not mind throwing off his clothes, so that he could get thoroughly wet and feel the fresh water on all his muscles. What person living in a town, he thought, could possibly know the joy of a long walk through a pretty country in the vernal rain, feeling as strong as a young plant spreading out all its leaves wide to catch the drops of rain?

On the subject of nature Walter was a great enthusiast; his intense love of nature amounted almost to a fanaticism. How could he help it?

Wiegen, however, was like the rest of the people in Eastloorn; he merely put up with nature. He put up with rain; he put up with sunshine; he put up with the heat; he put up with the cold. He suffered it all equably, with the equableness of people who have learned to treat nature as an enemy which only after a fierce struggle yields the gifts which they need for existence. This equableness did not make him rejoice in the sunshine, or grieve in the rain. Like all other farmers in the district, he knew rain in its wettest, and sunshine in its hottest form.

Wiegen was not actually thinking of the rain, or of the landscape. "I was thinking, sir," he remarked, "what a big world this is!"

"How do you mean?" Walter asked.

"We people here always seem to imagine that this is the world where we live, and that, outside of Eastloorn, there is no world. We are real egoists to think in that way!"

Walter did not quite follow the Dreamer's idea yet.

"Well," said Wiegen, "the best man in our parish is undoubtedly Edo, Ubbo's son, who went away as a missionary to the heathen about six years ago. I was thinking about Edo. He is really the only one among us who understood that the world is immense, and that Eastloorn is not the world. We are all egoists, who stick to our own, and stay with our own kith and kin. But he was not selfish; he left us, although he was fond of us; and he went to a distant nation, to see what he could make of them. Who shall deliver us from our selfishness, sir?"

"Do you also want to be a missionary, Wiegen?"

"Certainly I should like to! But I cannot; I am an egoist; and I am a man who only just escaped being a failure altogether; I am

stupid too; and a missionary must be a clever man."

"Was this Edo a clever man, then?"

"You should hear the old schoolmaster talk about that; he taught him and wished to make a minister of him. 'A missionary need not study so much as a minister,' the master always used to say; 'and Edo has a better head than a missionary requires!' But we thought that this opinion was only due to a little pardonable pride, such as a schoolmaster often shows in boasting of his pupils."

"Did you know him well, Wiegen?"

"Know him? Know him well? No, sir. For who is there who has looked much into the soul of his neighbour, and can say to himself: 'I know him well!' Most people are so deep that life is too short to fathom the depth of a soul, even of a friend. Perhaps you will one day peep into such a soul as Crazy Ake's, and you may be surprised at the depth of it. But I used to be on very friendly terms with Edo. You see, Edo has been among the heathen for six years, and he studied for four years in Holland, so that it is ten years ago since he left us. But before that time I saw a great deal of him, and he was a friend to me. Also when he came home

to the village sometimes during his years of study, the two of us were always together. He often sat with me on Scheper's moor, under the three birches, when I looked after the sheep."

"A good thing he was not such a dreamer as you were in those days," Walter laughed.

"Sir, do not joke about it, please," and Wiegen looked at him honestly; "that was a terrible illness, and God delivered me from it!"

Walter understood that he had made a thoughtless remark, and he hastened to return to their original point. But it was not necessary, for Wiegen, with much tact, had skilfully come back to their first subject of conversation, as if he were afraid of having shown the minister too plainly that he had not attained the standard of delicate discernment of his parishioners.

"Many people here thought it strange of him, at first, to go so far away; and then to the heathen! It was fanaticism, they said. They also thought he wanted to be uncommon, and it is the worst thing one can possibly be here to wish to be uncommon! When he came back for the first time during his years of study, he wore different clothes to

those he left in; he wore clothes such as the people in town wear; such as you have on yourself, sir. 'Look,' they said, 'he wants to be a gentleman!' Also he had let his moustache grow, a thing that no one in the village ever does. He wore a hat too, instead of a cap, when he walked through the village on his way to his father's house. The people were afraid that he had become conceited. They did not like him at all, at first! And that was quite natural, for he was certainly different to the others! But very soon their feelings changed. For early the next morning the peat-workers saw him help his father to fish in the river. 'How late you are,' he cried out cheerfully, 'our boat is half full of fish already; it seems that we town's-people can get up earlier than you can.' The peat-workers liked it in him, that he was not too proud to help his father with the fishing; and they began to praise him to others. And every morning during his holidays they saw him do the same thing. And that was not all he did. You know, sir, that Ubbo has a ferry, so that the people can cross the river at any time during the day or night. Well, whenever anyone came to this side and shouted 'Ahoy!' they would see Edo



coming out of his father's house on the other side, jumping into the boat and rowing it across. He was ferryman instead of his father in the holidays; and he did his duty in the daytime and at night during all these weeks. And all those who were ferried over spoke well of him; there was no conceit about him. When he walked through the village he would have a chat with anyone he met; his accent was just the same as when he left us; he talked no differently to the rest of the people. He often stood beside me in the field when I was in Goesting's service, and he would take a spade and work with me for hours at a time. The people heard of these things and then they said: 'He is still the same; he is as the rest of us.' And so he won back the favour of the village, and now, now we all consider it a great honour that an Eastloorn man is working among the heathen. Just let the people of Southloorn come and tell us that they have sent out a man to work among the heathen! Edo is a man who belongs to all of us. He must be a great man now, so we hear. But we all think that if he came back now, the next day he would be helping his father with the fishing and doing his father's work at the ferry, as he used to. Just ask anyone

about him, sir, and you will find that I have not exaggerated."

"Am I right in thinking that you have a special reason to speak well of him, Wiegen?"

"Yes, sir; in my eyes a missionary is the best proof that the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than any Church! And the people here are beginning to realize it more and more, when they hear about his work, — the Kingdom, the Kingdom is coming! What about the poor Churches then?"

Then Wiegen turned into a side road and the two men shook hands and parted.

Walter bent down a moment to let the water drip from his hat; then he took the hat off his head, shook it well, and put it on again.

Wiegen held his head high so that the water dripped into the collar of his coat; he did not turn his head away from the rain; he suffered it.

"You are a good lot, all of you!" Walter murmured, as he walked on cheerfully, thinking of Wiegen, and of Edo, as Wiegen had described him. A moment later, when he arrived at the poor cottage of a sick person, he shook the water off his back and shoulders.

"Are you visiting the sick, even in this rainy weather, sir?" the man there exclaimed.

And Walter laughed; he laughed because

what gave him pleasure was counted as a virtue.

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A letter had come from Edo for his father, Ubbo, the fisherman, from the East Indies. His letters came with great regularity, and it was a curious thing that everyone in the village thought he had a right to know what was in those letters. "Is he not our representative in that distant country, and can we not be proud of him? He is one of us, and he belongs to us all," the members of both churches were wont to say. And for that reason they considered it the right thing to take cognisance of all he wrote. It was not mere curiosity, it was their duty to know it.

Ubbo was not at all secretive, either, about his son's letters. He looked upon them almost as common property, and he was very willing to let anyone who came to see him read them. And so the news was soon spread into even the farthest huts on the moor. And in the winter evenings the men and women, even those who lived far away among the pine-woods, sat round the fire, talking about things which happened in that distant country, thousands of miles away.

Dreese was one of those who came regularly

to hear the contents of those letters. In the beginning he had not been very pleased with the idea that an Eastloorn man had become a missionary. Dreese could not put up with a person who wished to be original. But he had changed his mind, like all the others. And Edo's own father could not be more anxious for news than he was. Yet Dreese was very careful not to show how proud he was of the man who was showing the natives of those distant countries where he worked what good people there were in Eastloorn.

Another letter had come, and one or two people had read it, and in the evening, on the Square, the news was told to the other men. It was in the twilight, and it was dark already under the old oaks, otherwise one might have seen many eager faces and sparkling eyes while the story was being told. And many a young man would have said, if he had only dared, that he would not mind going out there as a missionary too.

"It is not a bad job!" Dreese suddenly said, when he had finished his story; "not a bad job, to be a missionary!"

This remark was rather a wet blanket on the people's quiet enthusiasm. There were always a good many who failed to understand Dreese.

"Do you think Edo became a missionary because it is not a bad job?" Raders said quickly; and it might have sounded sharp, if any but an Eastloorn man had said it.

"Of course not," Dreese answered composedly; "but no one knows himself well enough to be sure that his noblest deeds are not prompted by selfishness. Do you think any of us is without egotism? And do you think Edo is any better than the rest of us?"

"Dreese is only trying to rub us up the wrong way," Raders thought; "and he is tempting us to say things which we might be sorry for afterwards. It amuses him, and so I will draw him on. I am quite prepared."

"You know as well as I do," he said, aloud, "that Edo had no wish to better himself when he became a missionary. And how can anyone say then that he chose that profession in order to be greater than we are?"

"What would he have been if he had stayed at home? A fisherman, of course, like his father, and a ferryman who rows the people across for two cents each and ten cents in the winter, when there is ice! He was quite right to take the old minister's advice and study for a missionary. He is a gentleman now, and I have no doubt that he gets well



paid too! Only the other day he sent his father a hundred guilders! A poor man cannot do that!"

"It surprises me, Dreesse, that you have not yet suggested that we should stop the quarterly collection for the Mission. What is the use of that, if the missionaries are so well off, and earn so much money that they can save! I know that Edo suffers for it himself, when he helps his father, and you know that as well as I do. Just think of the house he lives in; it is not as good as yours, for he had to build it himself of wood and cane, which he found in that country. He also built his own church of the same materials. I should like to see you sitting there on those wooden benches without backs; you who are accustomed to sit in a side pew, under a canopy, higher than the other people. I suppose it is because he is rich that he builds such houses and churches! And as to the clothes which he wears, you saw them for yourself in the photograph which he once sent — a thin pair of trousers and a little coat; that is all. And did you not read in one of his letters that his food consists largely of rice every day, and that when they forget to send the flour he has to do without bread for three months

at a time? How would you like to live without bread for three months? 'Father,' he once wrote to Ubbo, 'it is not a bad thing, really, when the steamer does not come, for then our money lasts so much longer!' How do you picture the life of a missionary in the dark interior of the East Indies?"

Dreese's face lighted up with a knowing smile, as if he was glad of this opportunity to let the other people find out what the self-denial of a missionary is. And Goesting, who knew Dreese better than anyone else in the village, thought: "Dreese is only doing that to make Raders talk, so that everyone may know what an Eastloorn man can do, when he gives himself to a good cause!"

And Raders did talk. "Edo did not do it to be honoured! For do you remember the first letter which he wrote to his father? It was on the steamer, men," and here Raders turned to all who stood on the Square, — "it was on the steamer, and Edo, who was a steerage passenger, was forced to remain between decks. The first-class passengers have no intercourse with the steerage passengers. His companions were soldiers and petty officers on their way to Achin. There are many good men among those who enlist for the East, but

there are some very rough ones too. One fine day a seedy-looking petty officer said to him, as they were standing in a group: 'Are you going to convert the heathen, missionary? You would have done better to remain in your village; there are plenty of heathen there!' Before Edo had time to answer him, however, a sergeant took his part, and said: 'Silly idiot, if the heathen in Holland run away from their village and go to the East, as you do, surely a missionary must go after them, if he wants to convert them! How could this gentleman possibly get hold of you, if he had stayed in his village, as you wanted him to do! So hold your tongue, please!' Edo came out of it with flying colours that time, but he was beginning to understand more and more that his profession would not make him great; he was on his way to a country where a drunkard would have more to say than he. Such a thing seems impossible to us in Eastloorn."

Raders paused a moment to take breath, and Dreese was silent, so he went on.

"Two days later there was another incident. It was in the evening; the ship was gliding gently across the sea; there was not a breath of wind; nothing was heard but the noise of the engine and the screw. The afternoon had

been very hot, and the ladies and gentlemen were gently pacing up and down the deck. Thousands of stars shone in the sky, and the silvery moon was almost hidden by the black smoke which came out of the funnel. That must be a fine sight, men, a clear night on the sea! The cool night air surrounded the ship, and the people began to wake up. All of a sudden an old planter took hold of a young girl, and, before they knew what they were doing, they were dancing, and the rest soon followed. Someone sat down at the piano and played, and Edo, leaning over the bulwarks with his young wife, could hear it all. They were looking down into the deep water and across the wide sea, thinking of us in Eastloorn, of the beautiful nights which we have here. Dancing was in full swing, when, suddenly, they saw the old planter standing beside Edo's wife. You all know what a pretty girl Edo married, and many a first-class passenger had left the quarter-deck and lengthened his walk to the steerage in order to have a look at her. Well, as I was saying, the old planter was suddenly standing beside Edo's wife. 'All the gentlemen are wanting you to come and dance on the quarter-deck!' he said. — 'And my husband,' she retorted, 'what do they want

him to do?' — 'Oh, the missionary, we do not want him!' the planter actually answered. — You can imagine what Edo felt like. He stood with clenched fists, keeping himself, with a tremendous effort, from punching the man's red nose. You know what a strong man Edo always was, and it would have cost the planter his life. One knock with those fists would have done for him. But, of course, Edo restrained himself, although the effort almost took away his breath, as he leaned over the bulwarks, turning away from his enemy, so that he should not be tempted to strike him after all. 'May God forgive him for what he has done to my wife,' he muttered. And what do you think his wife did? She just put her arm round his neck, and gazed with him into the deep water, into which her tears fell. And the planter went straight back to the quarter-deck, and his laugh was so loud that the steerage passengers could hear it. I repeat, Edo knew, and he understood it more and more as time went on, that he had not chosen a profession which would make him great in the sight of men; he was on his way to a country where a wretched fellow like that had far more say than a good man. Who in Eastloorn can picture such a thing? The world is not all as it is



here, men! And everyone has not the same conception of civilisation. But I can safely say that a good man will be more honoured here, than a missionary is among white men in that distant country."

"You tell the story as if you had been present," Dreese said, with a touch of irony; "and how is it that you know exactly what it is like on board one of those steamers? Who told you? It is almost impossible for us, living in these remote parts, even to picture these things."

"I have read it all in his letters. But it cannot be difficult for you, Dreese, to picture it all, for are you not the only one of us who has ever seen one of those steamers? Did you not go to Amsterdam, six years ago, to see Edo off? You represented Eastloorn on that occasion, and you did well, man; the whole parish was grateful to you for it."

Dreese did not answer, for he felt a little ashamed when he remembered that he had raised himself above all the other men in the village in doing it. And Raders knew why Dreese was silent.

But Dreese soon pulled himself together.

"I am glad you are telling them all this!" he said, "for now our young fellows will understand that there is not much fun in being

a missionary. One is not paid for it, and not honoured either; and are not money and fame the most important things, the things we all strive after? An Eastloorn man must never go in for it again. Do you all hear that?"

And so saying he took his tobacco-pouch from his pocket and refilled his pipe. He lit it, and by the light of the burning match the men's faces were clearly visible under the dark trees. At the same time, he spat on the ground once or twice, as was his habit. All the other men did it too, and they were very clever in not doing it on each other's boots, even if they were standing close together. The boys tried hard to do it as well as the grown-up men.

Raders was just going to continue his story when Walter passed. He had seen what Dreese did as he lit his pipe, and he saw how all the other men did the same thing, every moment. "Do not spit so, men!" he exclaimed; "I shall have boards nailed on to the trees, as in the church, with the notice: Everyone is requested not to spit." And, so saying, he disappeared in the dark.

"The mayor had better not dare to tell us that!" Dreese said, with a grin; "but the minister has a right to say it!" And no one

made a remark against Walter, who had dared to touch an old custom which had existed in Eastloorn for a hundred years and more.

The meeting dispersed.

Raders' thoughts were with Dreese, as, coming out of the village, he walked up the path which led to his farm. "I know quite well why he talks like that. He is afraid that we shall be too proud of Edo. But he himself is prouder than any of us, that is quite clear. He also imagines that it is his place to educate our young men. For all he says is with the purpose of teaching them to be natural and never affected!" With these thoughts Raders shut the gate of his garden, and disappeared among the high trees which surrounded his house.

Raders was not far wrong. For, curiously enough, Dreese, with his queer sayings, gave everyone who came into contact with him as good an education as the ministers of both Churches could possibly wish for. And Dreese was quite well aware of the fact himself; and, as he talked, he was inwardly amused, but it was not until he shut the door of his grocer's shop behind him that a smile which he was forced to hide outside lit up his face.

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Senserff, the minister of the Dissenting

Church, was on his way to Utrecht. He had to change at Zwolle.

He looked about him on the platform, as a person does to whom the traffic at a station is not an everyday occurrence, and who does not mind changing the life in his quiet village for a more exhilarating one for a short time.

He would not have been sorry if he had had a few minutes to spare. He remembered a little incident which had taken place years ago when a farmer had driven him to the nearest station. He had laughed at the time, but now he began to understand. "You have driven splendidly," Senserff had said; "look, we are just up to time, the train is coming in; I have just time to take a ticket!" And the farmer had answered: "What a hurry you are in! In former days, when I sometimes drove the old minister to the omnibus in town, we used always to be half an hour too soon. But now, with the train, everything goes so quickly, one has not even time to look about!"

"I am beginning to feel like a farmer," Senserff thought, as the little incident came into his mind; "and in this case I am quite right to feel as a farmer does; for life at a station is quite worth contemplating, although

most travellers are in too great a hurry to think of such a thing."

Senserff, however, had no time to study the traffic, for his train was on the point of starting, and he got into a second-class carriage. He always travelled second-class; also he had always remained a gentleman in dress and manners, even in his remote village. His farmers liked him for it. Those wise men knew a real gentleman when they saw one. And their minister was a real gentleman. They often compared him with another minister, who had been in a neighbouring village for thirty years, and who had become a farmer in dress, as well as manners. "A minister must not be a farmer," they would say, "and a farmer must not be a minister." The people in Eastloorn did not quite know what to think of Walter, who was far more easy-going than Senserff. They knew that he always travelled third-class, and yet they were sure he was a real gentleman too.

"Why do you do it?" Senserff had once asked Walter. "It cannot be on account of the trifling difference in expense; you are unmarried, and have enough to live on."

"I will tell you," Walter had said. "To begin with, I was not too well off when I was



studying. Yet I was in a good club at the University, and, naturally, always travelled second-class. And when I became a minister I went on doing this for the first few months. I thought I owed it to my office. One day, however, I was in The Hague, where I had an interview with the court chaplain, Van Koetsveld. He received me most kindly, and his manners were very humble. That touched me, for I was in rather a socialistic mood that day. I had looked about me in The Hague, and compared my miserable poverty with the riches there, and had gone on thinking in the same strain. "Vanity of vanities, and all affectation!" Such were my jealous thoughts about life in The Hague. And the court chaplain's simplicity had not been able to take away that impression. In the afternoon I had to leave again, and who should come up to the station at the same time as I did? Our court chaplain! The royal carriage with fine horses drove up, the footman jumped from the box, the grand man got out, the footman coming behind him with his box. And in this manner he walked on to the platform, wrapped up warmly in his fur coat. 'Another instance,' I thought; 'they wear a fur coat here, while we, country ministers, must be satisfied with

an ordinary winter overcoat!' I was still in the same discontented mood, when he came up to me in a most friendly manner: 'Ah,' he said, 'this is the second time we meet to-day; that is nice!' And before long we were engaged in a conversation which lasted until the bell rang, for at that time they sounded a bell when a train was about to start. 'I must say good-bye to you,' I said hurriedly, 'for we shall not be travelling by the same class!' — 'Probably not,' he said gently, and he smiled as he said it. That smile irritated me more than anything I had seen or heard that day; and I was not in a sweet temper as I stepped into my second-class carriage, when, turning round, I saw him get into a third-class compartment! Ever since that day I have altered my opinion about many people in The Hague, and about the lives of those who dress in a fur coat and are attended by a royal footman. And since then I have not considered it a duty to travel second-class."

"I have never had a similar experience with a court chaplain," Senserff said, "so I see no reason why I should stop travelling second-class!" And he smiled cheerfully at Walter, who joined in the laugh.

When the train moved off, Senserff sank

back into the cushions with the comfortable sensation of a person who is accustomed to cover all distances by walking in his moorland village, and to whom it is a novelty to travel at a great speed, so that he has no time to notice the things as they fly past.

He tried not to look at a man sitting opposite him, who had annoyed him by cleaning his nails with a penknife, a thing which always irritated him beyond words, so that he turned away in disgust, and sat looking out of the window. He was so deep in thought that he was surprised when the train stopped at Amersfoort.

The man opposite him, who had been leaning out of the window, pulled in his head, and, still grinning about something he had seen outside, turned to Senserff and said: "Look at that man over there. Rather like a missionary whom the cannibals have forgotten to polish off!"

And, delighted with his own joke, he looked as if he expected a compliment, which did not come, however.

Senserff was prejudiced against the man, because he had cleaned his nails in his presence. Had that not taken place, his answer might have been different, and a little less

quarrelsome. "There is no reason, sir, to judge missionaries in the way you do!" he said.

The man, who had expected applause for his witticism, felt rather small after this remark, and to revenge himself he retorted: "I suppose you are the brother of a missionary, that you take their part in that way?"

Good heavens! that saying was calculated to bring Senserff into the right mood for a debate. On such an occasion he could feel absolutely convinced at the outset that he would come out victorious.

"Certainly I take the part of the missionaries! No one should make jokes about such men, especially those who do not know them personally. I suppose you have never seen one?"

"Yes, I have, in the 'Fliegende Blätter!' That cannibal has just devoured one. Look!" And with a malicious laugh he handed the illustrated paper which he had been reading to Senserff.

"Just as I thought," Senserff said, "you have never yet seen, far less spoken to, one of those men. I thought you must have got all your knowledge on the subject out of very second-rate papers!"

"You are wrong there, though! I know a good deal about missionaries; and I have my

information from a very good source, from an eye-witness. I have a brother in the East, who has just been over, and many an evening he has made us laugh heartily with his stories very frequently about missionaries. Loafers they are, and whenever they happen to work at all it is only to put up the natives against the Dutch."

"Loafers?" Senserff made a great effort not to shout too loudly. "Loafers?"

"Certainly! They sit at the club all day long, and I assure you that they know how to drink."

"Did your brother tell you all that nonsense? Are you aware of the fact that the missionaries are generally stationed in some out-of-the-way spot, far from civilisation, where they are the only white people? Where does the club come in, in that case? I know of many planters and civil servants whose greatest grievance against missionaries is that they will never sit and drink a whisky and soda with them, and in that way help to drive away the monotony of their lives!"

A sudden thought came into Senserff's head, and he hoped his surmise might be correct, so he made up his mind to find out.

"Before we say any more, allow me to



introduce myself. I am a minister; my name is Senserff, and my parish is a very small one in Overijsel...."

The other man mentioned his name too, but it was evident that he would have preferred not to. It also came out that he was a commercial traveller for a distillery.

"Just as I thought," Senserff said with a laugh, glad that he had guessed right. "Now I cannot understand why you, who on account of your business ought to rejoice the more people drink, blame the missionaries for knowing how to drink. From your point of view they are noble men, and you should call them good fellows. No, my good sir, that does not square with what you said before. And I see through it all perfectly well. Shall I tell you what it is that you do not like about these men? It is this: they are generally total abstainers, and they fight hand and tooth against the importation of your strong drink! And instead of saying, sir, that you do not like them because they make things difficult for you, you say that you do not care for them because they themselves drink. The devil sometimes uses the same weapon when he warns the people against their opponents by saying: 'Look out for those people, for the devil is in them.'"

Senserff was thinking of Edo, and had he been an Eastloorn man himself, he could not have defended him more warmly.

"Loafers?" he repeated, as the other did not answer.

With a disdainful smile the man had taken a small mirror and brush out of his waistcoat pocket and started brushing up his moustache, while he twisted and turned his head, studying his face in the glass. He did not forget to arrange the lock of hair on his forehead either. Senserff, who had not forgotten the incident of the nail cleaning, became more and more annoyed. "Vain men," he thought, "are worse than vain women, for vain women have the sense to hide their vanity." And aloud he said: "Your hair is quite all right now, sir. Just listen to this:

"I know a missionary who went out six years ago. He was sent to an island where there are only two or three white men — a post-master, an official, and one other. When he had been there a year, he ordered a lot of cotton to make clothes for the natives, who went about without any. The official objected to this and a difference of opinion ensued. I do not know whose part you would have chosen in this quarrel, but can you realise how much

more civilised and moral a population becomes when it is taught to feel a sense of shame?"

"I dare say he earned a good deal on that ship's cargo of cotton! It must be a profitable business to teach the natives a sense of shame!" the wine agent answered scornfully.

"You can be sure of that!" Senserff said, and there was unmistakable sarcasm in his tone and face: "he earned just as much on that as on that other cargo which he ordered from Holland too; all sorts of tools for field labour and carpentry, so that each labourer has his own spade now, and the trees have been sawn into boards, and the houses in the village are stronger and nicer than any other houses for miles around. Do you know what it means to accustom a population to have their own dwellings, and to teach them to work, to raise the standard of agriculture, and to make of it a regular source of income? Do you know that the work of a missionary is part of the history of civilisation?"

Senserff was thinking of Edo all the time, and it was his work he was describing.

"I cannot see why it is necessary to civilise those black people," the other man objected; "let them remain as they are!"

"I know quite well, sir, why you have no

desire to further the civilisation of your neighbours. Certainly you would like to leave them as they are; you have no desire to put out your hand to help any one. If you did anything to those people, it would be the same thing you do to your fellow creatures here; you would offer them strong drink, and teach them to drink until you had made good customers of them, so that you would be well paid for your noble work. I suppose you feel very well satisfied every evening when you think of the amount of strong drink you have sold. It is a far nobler work to make drunkards than to promote agriculture and industry!"

Senserff paused a moment, thinking the man would speak in self-defence, but as there was no answer, he continued:

"To carry on the comparison between that missionary and you, sir! That Edo, — I mean that missionary, sits among those black people for four hours each day to teach them to read and write. — By the way, how many hours of your life have you spent in trying to teach a stupid fellow whom you knew to read? Has it ever even interested you to know that there are people who cannot read or write? I suppose not. — That missionary tells an immoral person that he must stop

his wicked manner of living and that he must be good and pure. Have you ever tried to make a good man of a wicked man? I dare say it has never occurred to you that you might try it. Has it now? — That missionary seeks the thieves in their hiding places, and he hopes to make honest men of them, and he believes that he can do it. You have never had any other thoughts about a thief than that he should be in prison; I am convinced your thoughts never went beyond a prison in connection with a thief. That missionary breaks them off the habit of swearing which the official teaches them. Have you ever told any one to stop swearing?" And it cannot be denied that Senserff's laugh, when he said this, was a little malicious, for the wine agent had used many rough swear-words during the course of conversation, and Senserff was glad of the opportunity to let him know what he thought of swearing.

"Every one swears," the man said, as if he were speaking in self-defence.

"Not at all, sir, every one does not swear. It is only a form of affectation to show that one is not pious; only affected people swear. You yourself know quite well that you only do it to show the world how clever you are."

Senserff was not at all surprised at himself



for daring to speak in this way. He would have laughed heartily if any one had said to him: "But how did you dare to say all that?" and he would have answered: "Oh, I could not help it. He was so absolutely in my power, and I have always been able to tackle novices!"

He had not nearly finished talking, although the other man was silent.

"Do you know what else a missionary does, sir? First I thought I would not tell you, because I wondered whether you would understand. But I will tell you, and I think you will understand. A missionary...." Senserff had made up his mind to go straight to the point and not to mince matters — "a missionary comes straight to a man and says: 'You must be converted. You are not happy, and you cannot be happy on account of your sins. You know quite well what your sins are, but you must not be unhappy; God loves you too much for that.' And to make God's love quite clear, he will start telling him the story of the Cross, which you undoubtedly heard in your youth when you went to church as a boy. Perhaps your mother told you about it; for your mother did not chaff about these things, did she?"

The wine agent was quite at sea by this

time; he was not quite sure whether the minister was telling him how the missionary converted the natives, or whether he was preaching at him. He almost thought it was the latter, and it did not please him, for no one had ever tried that on with him before. So to cover his nervousness, he took his toothpick out of his pocket and began to clean his teeth, smacking his lips in an offensive manner.

This did not irritate Senserff as it would have done at another time. He had become the pastor who has discovered a wandering sheep, and who, forgetting everything else, is filled with one desire. That picking of his teeth, that smacking with his lips, he knew was only a mannerism put on in order to sooth his conscience. It did not annoy Senserff at all: for all he cared he might start cleaning his nails too, or take out his mirror and brush. At that moment Senserff was filled with the true desire to convert.

And as he was still trying to convince the wine agent of what the love of God might mean for him, the train stopped again, at Utrecht this time.

Without greeting, the man collected his things and got out of the carriage. A moment

later Senserff saw him standing in the refreshment room, with a glass of gin and bitters in his hand.

The minister felt very unhappy as he walked through the streets of his old University town. He felt again as he had done so often, after a conversation with unregenerate people, that he was a sad conqueror; a conqueror who has not succeeded in making the love of God shine in his words, so that it might seem acceptable to the other person. "Another failure," he muttered to himself; "shall I never learn to speak more gently with the erring sheep? I do not love sinners, I do not love them enough. I shall never be a good minister, and I have been one for eight years now!" And he almost wept over his own shortcomings.

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Never before had Walter had a more difficult task to fulfil.

One evening he received a letter from the Missionary Society to which Edo belonged. And it was very sad news which he read. The missionary had not been able to stand the climate, and had finally succumbed to a terrible fever. A letter written by Edo's wife was enclosed, so that Walter could read all particulars. After having read it, Walter was

requested to be the bearer of the sad tidings to the missionary's old parents. The Society thanked him beforehand for undertaking this very painful duty.

Walter was startled. The news had come to him quite unexpectedly, and he was glad that the Missionary Society had not allowed the parents to hear it in the same way.

He was passionately moved as he sat down to read the wife's description of her husband's death.

He sat at his writing desk until the small hours of the morning before he awoke from his dreams, which had carried him far away to that distant country. At last he got up and said aloud: "Yes, I understand they want me to break the terrible news to the old couple, but oh, I wish they had chosen some one else! For there is no one less capable of doing it than I am. However, it is my duty, and I shall do it!"

And early the next morning he started, and walked with lagging footsteps in the direction of Ubbo's house.

"It is curious," he thought, "how a man's very walk is affected by his mental condition." He had to cross the meadows before he came to the dyke. A small path through the grass,

over a little bridge across a ditch, through a gate which he pulled shut behind him — such was his walk across the meadows.

A wagtail flew on in front of him, and settled down on the path. When he came near it flew away and came down a little farther on. And it did the same thing several times. Walter knew the habits of these birds quite well. "I wonder how long it will keep me company," he thought. Only when he had climbed to the top of the dyke, — and that was almost half an hour later, — did the little bird leave him; once more it fluttered up at his feet and flew away towards the meadows. "I must look the subject up at home," Walter thought; "I must find out why they do that. It interests me." He was so full of this incident that he had almost forgotten his painful task of that morning. When he reached the top of the dyke he thought of it with a sudden sense of depression. But it was only for a moment, for there in front of him lay the Vecht.

He caught sight of the glistening stream of water. The sunshine, coming towards him from the other side, made a wide streak of light on the river. This wide streak of light seemed to follow him as he climbed down the dyke. Several peat-boats went by. The



gentle wind did not catch the sails much, but they went down stream and the skipper and his man sat quite comfortably at the helm. The minister knew all these people, and every time a boat passed a cheerful greeting was exchanged across the water.

Later on it was again quiet around him: there was no one to be seen.

At a bend of the river, where a mass of bulrushes grew, the stream became wider. The stalks were tall and strong. That was quite natural, Walter thought, for the roots grew in good river soil; the stalks were as thick as his finger. He heard a reed warbler whistle, and 'Hallo' he said, "there must be a nest here too!"

He knew that these nests were among the most marvellous ones to be found; and he hunted among the rushes, and stood still every now and then, as if he were in no hurry at all and had no difficult task waiting for him. There, there, on the spot from where the reed warbler had tried to lure him by his whistling, there he saw a nest! Three or four stalks were bent towards each other and tied together crossways. It seemed impossible to believe that a small bird could have accomplished this almost gigantic task. And there

where the stalks were fastened together it had built its little nest, strong and warm, and almost invisible to those who did not really look for it.

"I want that," Walter thought, and he climbed to the water. But before he could get hold of the nest he had to walk through the mud, so that his feet sank deep into it. But he did not mind that. His boots were not fit to be seen when he climbed up again, carrying the four stalks which he had cut off with the little nest hanging in them.

"A splendid decoration for my study," he thought.

Then with much care he chose a place on the bank where he could hide his find, intending to take it with him on his way home. He tried to clean his boots on the long grass, but it was of little avail; they remained dirty. He went his way cheerfully. And only then it occurred to him that it might be cruel to rob a bird of its nest. "Cruel! Nonsense! a good subject for an old maid's tea-party!" he scoffed; but a moment later, he thought: "How is it that remorse never comes in time? And what is the good of it then?" He had gone about a hundred yards further when he decided to find out scientifically whether

remorse was in reality nothing but an acquired characteristic.

He did not think much during his walk, of how he was going to fulfil his mournful duty and if it occurred to him at all it was with a deep sense of depression. "I am not the sort of man to undertake the thing which I have been asked to do," he would say to himself then.

But these moments were not long. For later on, when he came to a still more lovely part of the Vecht, his eye was caught by sights which were not to be seen every day.

Strange water-birds appeared suddenly above the surface of the water, as if they spent all their time underneath. But a moment later they were gone, for they had seen him and had disappeared beneath the water with innate timidity, as if their home were really there. Soon however they reappeared a little further on. Walter had very little time to find out what sort of birds they really were, they were so quick. But he recognised them; they were the water-birds which live on eels. They could swim faster than the fastest fish; and were unequalled for gluttony. He knew that the eel fishers would catch ten times as many eels each year if it were not for these birds!

Here where the Vecht was wide, the timid creatures dared to swim about. Walter wondered whether he could throw a stone across the wide river. He thought he would try. He looked about on the dyke and found a suitable one. Then he bent his body far back and with a strong swing of his long arm he flung the stone, and it came down, not right across the river, but among the bulrushes on the other side. About twenty ducks flew up from where the stone had come down. They flapped their wings against the rushes, trying hard to get out from among them; then they suddenly flew straight up into the air, higher and higher, until at last he lost sight of them.

"It's a fine life, Ubbo's!" Walter thought; "out on the water all day long, with the eel-baskets and with the nets, and with a rifle beside him in the boat!"

The thought of Ubbo, however, had reminded him of his task. And he felt deeply humiliated that the many duties of his noble calling were so easily pushed aside by what he called his primitive instincts, his love of birds, plants, and clouds. And he walked on, looking very sad.

It was high time, too, for him to collect his thoughts, for there, on the other side

of the water, he saw the house of Ubbo, the man to whom he was going to break that awful news of which he had hardly thought during his long walk.

"Woe is me!" he muttered; "happy the ministers who care nothing about nature, who sit at the fireside with pale faces, talking to their elders, a long pipe in their mouth; and who have white hands, because they never touch anything but their thickly buttered bread, and the pen with which they write their sermons! Oh, Winfried, Winfried, now I can imagine what a difficult task you must have had, when you taught those Old-Germans that life in a cloister was better than life in the forests, and it was nobler to hold a cross or a pen than to carry a bow and arrows! I think I should have been a very difficult one to convert!"

This mental conflict was almost more than he could bear, and, putting his hand to his mouth, he shouted across the water: "Ahoy!" The Eastloorn people always gave this sign when they wished Ubbo to cross over in his boat and fetch them.

Tall old elm trees towered above Ubbo's low house. And Ubbo's figure looked very small under those gigantic trees as he shut



his door and walked quietly to the boat. His legs did not seem very strong, for his body swayed from right to left as he walked, as is the case with old men. But, when he was seated in the boat, his arms proved to be strong enough to pull the oars; for the stream, though very powerful, did not carry the boat along, and it landed exactly where Walter was standing. He jumped in, so that the old man had only to turn round without leaving his seat.

"Get up, now, Ubbo; I want to sit there," Walter said; "give me the oars!" It was evident that this was not the first time that the minister had made this request, for Ubbo made no objections, and laughingly handed over the oars as he seated himself at the stern. Walter would go back in a shorter time than Ubbo had taken to come.

As Walter stepped out of the boat, Ubbo noticed his dirty boots. "Have you been walking through the mud, sir?" he enquired. "Surely the dyke was not wet. How did that happen?" And, taking a bunch of straw, he wanted to clean the boots.

But Walter would not hear of it. "It does not matter," he said aloud, but under his breath he muttered: "If the oxen and sheep

of Amalek do not proclaim a man's sins aloud, his boots will do it!"

Old Ubbo's wife gave him a warm welcome at the door, but it seemed to Walter that she also looked askance at his boots, and in his heart of hearts he cursed the bulrushes, and the reed-warblers as well. Never, he thought, had he been in a more inappropriate frame of mind for a duty which had been laid upon him.

But on entering the house he felt his mood suddenly change.

Ministers must be able to change their mood readily; for do they not go from a funeral to a wedding, and from a wedding to a funeral, and are they not the most important person on both occasions? While other people have time to let their moods change gradually, gradually, the minister must often do it suddenly, without any transition! That is a mental strain which undermines the health of many ministers.

The Walter who stood in the hut was a different Walter to the one outside, and yet both were honest and straightforward people.

When he sat down at the table, facing the old couple, he was ready, ready, for his task.

How really to perform it he could not tell; God would help him.

"Have you heard from Edo lately?" Walter enquired.

"That is always your first question when you sit down," Ubbo said kindly. "I can see you are fond of him, although you have never known him."

"Well, it is quite natural, after hearing from every one what a man he is! He does wonders in that country. Not many missionaries are blessed as he is. Is it not the fifth school that he is building now?"

"Yes, the fifth one," the old mother said, "but this one is not quite ready yet. The people had not yet brought the straw for the roof."

The woman spoke as if she were discussing a thing which had taken place in the village. Her clear, steel-blue eyes looked frankly at the minister, and Walter could not help looking into them. "There are women who have hardly anything on their conscience," he reflected; "I should like to know the history of her youth, whether it tallies with those eyes. It is quite possible, though; such women do exist!" And he showed his respect for the woman in his confidential manner to her husband. Aloud he said:

"The most beautiful side of it all to me is not those five schools, but the ten teachers whom he has prepared. And then, how does he get the young people to sit on the benches? I dare say they much prefer hunting in the wood or fishing in the sea!" And Walter thought of his walk and of Winfried,

"Edo's village is on the sea," the mother remarked, "and the people are great fishermen; he did not require to teach them how to make nets. But still it was a good thing that he could do it himself, for, quite at the beginning, when no one trusted him yet, it was just because they saw him fishing in the sea, that they approached him. Their boats came nearer and nearer to his, until at last they were lying side by side; and then he made friends; the ice was broken. Then they helped him to build his house; the house is quite close to the sea too, but high up, against the rocks, under the tall trees, and if you want to get to the house, you have to climb up a steep and narrow path. From a front room there is a fine view across the sea, and Edo and his wife often stand there at sunset. It looks towards the West, and they think of their old father and mother, he writes. But I believe they always do that; I am sure of it."

Walter was lost in amazement at the woman's capacity to picture that scene as if she had seen it, and to talk about it as if she had lived with them for years in that house by the sea.

"I believe you are always thinking about them," he said.

"So I am" she answered. "I am always with them in that house on the rock; and I stand there too, and I look across the sea with Edo and his wife."

"Are they never here with you, in your house, or over there at the boat?"

"No, they are never here; I am always with them, over there."

"What an extraordinary imagination," Walter thought. "I have found the way; I know now how I must break the news to the old people! I could not have a better ally than their imaginations!"

And aloud he said: "But you have not yet told me whether you have heard from him lately."

"Well, it must be about four weeks ago," Ubbo answered, "and I am sure you will have heard, sir, what was in that letter. I think Dreese told the other men on the Square, as he generally does."

"Yes, I knew that; but I had not heard



whether they were well and healthy. Has his wife not had a third child, and was she quite well again?"

"Yes, she is better," the old mother said, "and the baby was all right too; but Edo himself had a touch of fever, he wrote."

"These fevers are nothing unusual there, I believe," Walter remarked. "Edo has written about it before. I suppose he will pick up, as he did the last time?"

"I do not know," the old mother said, "it is lasting so long! And it seems to come back so often! That is why they went to live on the rock; the village itself is much lower down. If you go down the steep path, and round by the rock in the opposite direction to the beach, you come into the flat country, and at a quarter of an hour's distance you will find the village. But Edo did not want to live there; he thought he was more likely to catch the fever there than up above in the purer air. And they are quite right. And yet, it is not as it should be; for he always carries the little box with him; and as long as he has to do that, I shall not be at rest."

"What little box?" Walter asked.

"With the pills, the fever pills. He is his own doctor, for there is none there, of course.

But that is not necessary; he is as clever as a doctor himself, for he learned medicine among all the other things. And when he helps the masters at the school with the teaching he always takes four of those pills during the lesson. And before he mounts the pulpit in church he always takes four pills too. And also when he goes on horseback to those other villages where he preaches. He must often ride for about two hours before he gets there, and he takes them on the road. And his wife wrote the other day that he takes them every now and then during the day-time. That cannot be a good sign, sir!"

"No," Walter said decidedly, "he is ill then, really, and not a healthy man." He felt that he was steering towards the awful thing which he was about to do.

"Ubbo will not believe it when I say it," she said; "I tell him so often our boy is ill, he is not well! But Ubbo always says: 'Come, come, he will be all right soon!' Do you hear now, Ubbo, what the minister says?"

But the minister answered quickly, instead of Ubbo, for he felt that he must strike the iron while it was hot. "I had a letter from the Missionary Society the other day, telling me he

was down with fever again. It is only a short time ago. But the letter was full of praises again. Your son is a man!"

"What then?" the mother enquired, for Walter's exclamation made her think that there was more.

"Just fancy," Walter continued: "one day the fever came up again, but worse than ever before. Anna got him to go to bed, much against his wish. But she persuaded him to do it, for she is very decided. She went to the front of the house, as he was just going to mount his horse; she...."

"She took the reins out of his hand," the old mother interrupted, and her eyes were sparkling; "she gave them to the black boy and said: 'Take the horse to the stable!' And she put her arms round her husband's neck and said: 'You must come in, Edo; you cannot go out to-day; come, lean on me, for you can scarcely stand on your legs!' And she led him inside, and she undressed him, and let him sit on the side of his bed, and then she put her arm round him, so that he might not fall back suddenly against the pillows. And then she sat down beside his bed and waited, hoping that the fever would pass off. I know all

about it, sir, I know what she did. A woman can easily guess that!"

"Exactly," Walter said; "and just fancy; that fever did not pass off during that whole day, and for three days after that. At last Edo began to wander; he seemed to be thinking of all sorts of things; he talked of his parish and of his teachers, and of the Dutch official who is there; he talked about a new road which he was wanting to make across the mountains to the heathen who live in an even more remote part of the island, and whom he wanted to bring into closer contact with his village; he talked about the new missionary, who, he hoped, might be sent out by the Society, for he had great plans; he talked about the coffee plantations which he wanted the natives to make, and of the rice-mills which he had ordered from Holland, and which were so long in coming. He talked about all the things of which he had been thinking, and occasionally he started preaching, as if he were in the pulpit or standing on the beach among his fishermen with his Bible in his hand. Oh, that attack of fever was very bad!"

"And his wife just sat beside him," the old woman said, with a wonderful light in her eyes, "and she held him up, and she

stopped him if he wanted to get up; and she just said: 'Edo, be quiet, Edo, my boy!' And she took his head in her arms, if he insisted on sitting up, and she let him rest his head against her shoulder; and she let him drink cold water, which the black boy had to fetch from behind the house, where the little waterfall is. And she did not sleep, and she did not eat for four days; she could manage it all herself, she said, and did not want help from any of the others. Am I right?"

"Yes, but on the sixth day her strength gave way," — Walter cut short her imagination, — "and help was required. And this is a fine part; on the sixth day the black elder was standing at the door by the verandah, and he said: 'I have waited here since the day before yesterday, and surely you will not refuse my help now.' And that black man came in and implored her to go to bed; he himself would watch by the sick-bed. And Anna could not refuse; for she was exhausted. And then they watched in turns, Anna and the black man."

"And that of course, went on until they were both exhausted; for Edo got worse and worse, did he not?"

"Yes, much worse," the minister said, "for



he was wild; only sometimes though, for as a rule he was too weak even to sit up. And at moments they noticed that there was something troubling him, and in his fever he could not say it. At last the two could make out that he imagined that his parishioners had run away and had become heathen again. And, when that thought came over him, he was wild, so that they could scarcely keep him in bed; for then he would try to get up. It was awful, that fighting between the black elder and Edo."

"They were not able to keep him in bed between the two of them, I know that beforehand. For no one here was ever as strong as Edo. Poor boy, I am sure he got out of bed; and I know they could not prevent him from climbing down the steep path."

"No, it did not happen in that way," — here Walter had to correct her again, from what he knew historically from the letter, — "it was in this way. It was during the twentieth night, and they were both staying up, for it seemed to them that he would not live until the morning. And, exhausted as they were, they both fell asleep. Then he got up in his fever, went out of the house, down the steep path, and walked to the village — he who otherwise had not the strength to walk ten

steps. And in his raving he knocked at the doors and shouted at each house: 'Open the door! I want to know if you are all still here! Open the door! Who has run away? And who have returned to their idols?' And he stood on the square of the village shouting: 'Come here, Philip and Luke,' — those are two elders, as you know, — 'come here, I wish to know whether you have herded my flock while I was away! Bring all my sheep here, I want to count them! Not one must be wanting!' And as he was calling and preaching along the road and on the square in the dark night, the people came running out of their houses. 'Who is there?' they shouted. But very soon they knew. They stood round him; Philip and Luke quite close to him; they were filled with fear and reverence, and did not know what to think of it, or what to do. But Edo had begun counting: "One, two, three, four," and so on — fearing that one might be wanting. Then suddenly...."

"I know, of course, his wife came rushing into the crowd." — The old mother had got up, and she stood quite close to the minister, her whole being trembling, as she went on passionately: — "She woke up with a start, for he was no longer in bed; and with a shriek she

ran outside, down the path, to the right, round by the rock to the village, and there she found him among his villagers. 'Edo! Edo!' she cried, as she fell into his arms. And that cry brought him to his senses. But it also took away all his strength; and he fell down, did he not, and the people caught him up and carried him, and all his strength was gone? And so they carried him back to his house in the night, up by the steep path, while Philip and Luke said to the other people: 'Please do not all come, six of you are quite enough. Go home, you men and women, and be very quiet, for he is very ill, our master!' But I do not know what happened up there in that house; you must tell me that, sir; for you got the letter. Did he get better, my Edo?"

And this brought Walter to the most difficult part. And suddenly, as he realised that this was the right moment to break the news, he said: "No, he did not get better, he died of it the next day."

The spell of the old woman's imagination was broken, and she sank down by the table, covering her face with her hands, weeping gently, quietly, as if she had wept many times before about the same story, and as if she had known

it all before. Her grey hair came out of her cap and fell over her arms and hands.

Ubbo got up with a vacant stare, and went to the door and came back again; he did not know what he was doing. But this indecision lasted only a moment, for, from the other side of the river came the well-known cry, so that he pulled himself together, the cry of Ahoy! Without a word he went out of the door and walked away under the high trees, his body swaying from right to left, as is the case with old men; and a moment later he was in his boat again, rowing with strong arms.

"You can depend upon it," Dreese said later on to the men on the Square; "you can depend upon it that the man whom Ubbo rowed across noticed nothing unusual about Ubbo, and that he did not tell the man anything about the awful news which he had just heard. We are like that in Eastloorn, hard natures, with gruff faces, and of few words. I am convinced that Ubbo talked to him about the price of the pigs at the market from which the man came!"

"I fear we shall never learn how to express our sorrow," Raders answered. "We shall never be able to learn what our parents did not

know; and I fear it will be the same with our children."

It was also said on the Square that evening that Walter had not spoken many words of comfort after he had broken the sad news, and that he had not even offered up a prayer with the bereaved parents. He had gone away as if nothing unusual had taken place.

Dreese had not omitted to tell this story in his usual manner, as if he were trying to take some one in. And he was quite successful too; for he made Niesink, the bee-farmer, remark: "Oh, your minister does not go in for that sort of thing. Senserff is quite different!"

Raders was on the point of answering, and it is certain that his defence of the Reformed minister would have been to the point. But it was not necessary, for Schepers began to speak: "Look here, Niesink, do you think that praying in public is really necessary in some cases? I am sure that Ubbo and his wife did not require it. They were quite capable of doing it themselves; their spirit was strong, and not broken. Prayer must not become an outward show, and one must know when and where it is required."

This speech, coming from Schepers, Schepers



of the Dissenting Church, did Walter more good than anything the others might have said, for — they all knew it — Schepers himself had offered up a prayer aloud in the presence of another person, that of his own minister when he had lost his wife.

The rumour was quite true; Walter had not stayed long with the old couple after doing his duty. And he went home, filled with the one thought: he wondered what most ministers would have thought of his manner of breaking the sad news to the old people. And he was very much afraid that they would have shaken their heads wisely, and they would not have approved his action. Walter knew quite well how they would have done it themselves, with great unctuousness, and quoting numbers of texts.

He did not forget to find the spot where he had hidden his nest. He carried the long stalks carefully over his shoulder, not to break them, and walked to his house through the village street, attracting much attention from the school-boys who crowded behind him. And at that moment even he felt that he was not much like a minister coming home after having accomplished the most difficult task that a minister could possibly be called upon

to do. "Oh, Winfried, Winfried!" he sighed.

Such was Walter's nature.

When he came into his study, he placed the long stalks with the nest on the mantel-piece, beside the mirror, and after he had admired the decoration he suddenly thought again of the dead missionary. And without any hesitation he knelt down by his chair and prayed for the poor bereaved missionary's wife, who was there on that lonely island, in that far country, alone with her three children, in that house on the high rock.

The next Sunday, both ministers in the village preached a strange sermon. The greater part of each sermon was devoted to the life history of Edo, the Eastloorn man. This gave great satisfaction to both congregations. And the people went home not a little impressed. Secretly, they were all very pleased that Edo was one of them, but they knew very well how to hide their pride.

"It is a curious thing," remarked Wiegen, the Dreamer, "that neither of the two ministers made it clear in their sermon to which Church Edo belonged, and, somehow, both the Dissenters and the Reformed Church seem to think that he belongs to both Churches. Do

you see it, men? The Kingdom of Heaven is greater than the Church."

The members of both Churches were beginning to understand Wiegen better when he spoke in that way.

## X

### DOUBT

Mr. Senserff had one trouble of which no one knew.

If the elders had known anything about it they would not have believed their ears, and they would have been puzzled to know how to act.

But the minister kept it well out of sight; none of the members of his Church ever noticed it at all.

He was not better than any other person then, for he also had his secret chamber, where he dared not allow any one to enter. He had the door well locked; the shutters were closed, and never opened. There in the darkness he guarded his secret very carefully, and the minister himself was the dog that lay at the door, rising up and growling if anyone put his hand on the knob.

Mr. Senserff's secret was that he was often subject to much doubting.

Merciful heavens! how could that be possible? If it had even been Walter! Walter, the man of the Reformed "congregation!" One could expect anything from him; but Senserff? How could it be possible?

If the fact had been known to the elders of both Churches, then one could have imagined the following conversation being held between the two sets of elders on the Square.

"Schepers," Raders, the elder of the Reformed Church would have said, "what do you think of this, that even your minister has his doubts about the truth?"

And Schepers, feeling ashamed, would have held his tongue, as one who does not know what to say.

But Niesink, the bee-farmer, would have helped him: "You had better be silent, for who knows, Raders, what a doubter your minister may be!"

"Have you ever heard of that then? No, my man, you do not hear such things about ours!"

"It is rather like the man, though. I should have suspected him of it sooner than our minister. That man with his cheerful face,



who is continually laughing, — can he be serious?"

"Why do you want to measure a man's seriousness by his cheerful face? Is Senserff more serious because he always looks gruff and gloomy?"

"Walter is always full of fun; if you were sitting in the train to Zwolle and you heard him there, you would not think he was a minister!"

It seemed to Schepers that the bee-farmer was going rather too far in his zeal to defend Senserff. Although it was for a good cause, it was rather too sharply put for an inhabitant of Eastloorn, and he pulled Niesink's sleeve to remind him of the customary calmness of his people.

But the latter answered: "Why should I not say it, Schepers?"

"You do not understand our minister," Raders said, and he remained quite unruffled, which raised him above his adversary. "If Walter with his cheerful face comes to a man who is in difficulties, and he sits there for half an hour, he can go away; that man will have plucked up courage! That's what cheerful talking does; just you try and do it with a gloomy face! Shall I tell you what he said the

other day in a sermon: 'Every one has his cross to bear, and it is not fair to worry any one else with one's cross, and to add it to what he has to bear already, and so make his burden heavier.' Do you understand the secret of our minister's cheerfulness? He also has his cross to bear, and some of us know what it is, but who has ever seen him come to someone else and even mention it? He suffers his affliction alone, and keeps his cheerfulness for others! That is the shepherd's true task, I should think!"

"And about that incident in the train," Raders continued, "you were there yourself, Schepers, — was not the end that those cattle-dealers moved up and listened to him as people who did not understand themselves, and were astonished at themselves? And when they were ready to leave the train, did not one of those swearers say: 'I cannot see it, in your dress, but I believe you are a minister?' And a thing I have never seen before was that, in saying good-bye, they all shook hands in a friendly and respectful manner. Would it have been better if he had sat reading his paper in a second-class carriage, afraid to come out with his religious views?"

Schepers, with his gentle nature, could not

understand how Niesink would dare to say any more, and he was surprised when he saw the bee-farmer flare up, as someone does who has been beaten in an argument, saying: "That may be, — but he is a man for a wedding, to sit at a table, drinking wine and eating cake in a roomful of dancing women and boys; and life is not a wedding feast; it is more like a funeral, as all we men and women who have lived the greater part of our life already know. He is not the man for a funeral."

But now the bee-farmer had spoilt his own cause absolutely, for Raders spoke, more quietly than anyone else could have done. "Do not compare our minister to one of those men who goes the round of the houses, notifying everyone of a death, — one sees them in town, and recognises them by their clothes and their funereal faces. But the difference between those men and a minister as you would wish him to be, — I will not say like Senserff, for he is better than you make him out to be, — is this, that those men announce a death when it has already taken place, and that your minister, as you wish him to be, goes from door to door, telling the people that death is approaching. If a minister does his duty, he will be very careful to tell

the people occasionally that death is never far off, but he will not go about with a look in his face as if he were always shadowed by death! And then, Niesink, you should not say that life is more like a funeral than a wedding. There is an orchard behind my house, and when in spring the trees are white with blossom I say: 'That is life.' And when in autumn the branches are heavy with golden apples, which hang among the brown leaves, I say again: 'That is life.' Life is both a funeral and a wedding, and, as far as I can see, a funeral follows every wedding; but, in so far as I have read the Scriptures, as you have done too, Niesink, a funeral is invariably followed by a wedding, where our Lord is the bridegroom. That wedding shall be the last chapter in the history of man, and that history does not end with this earthly life! And if you looked well at our minister's cheerful face you would think that he is already enjoying a foretaste of that eternal wedding feast, — but you do not know him, and you cannot see through a man's face!"

"That may be quite true," the bee-farmer said; "but I must say that your minister is more likely to doubt than ours is!"

This conversation might have taken place

among the elders on the Square. But it never did take place.

Good heavens! could it be possible that Senserff was a doubter! Yes, such was the case! The man who could pass such severe judgment on unbelievers, who could defend the faith of the prophets so warmly that he had made his name in all the neighbouring villages, who could speak so convincingly that none of his followers doubted any more, — he was a doubter himself. He, who had been willing to sacrifice his social position, his money, his name, in the cause of his Church, he was a doubter, yea worse, an unbeliever, sometimes for moments, often for weeks and months at a time.

When the elders of the Dissenting Church went home after the sermon, and as they walked together to the cross-roads, where each one went down his own path, they would talk of the well-founded faith of their shepherd, and of his sincere conviction of everything concerning that faith.

“I wish I were as sure of myself,” Schepers said.

“I might have thought that of you,” the bee-farmer said; “you are nearer the minister



than any of us. What must we say then?"

"No, no, you cannot know how the devil tempts me as I follow my sheep," Schepers said; but they never got any more out of him.

But the truth was that the minister was often troubled with doubts, very grave doubts. Had they known, what could they have said? The ground would have slipped away from beneath their feet. The shepherd would have thought that the whole country had become marshland; the housekeeper would have given notice. A great shame would have come over all; they would not have dared to look the members of the Reformed Church in the face.

That doubt would come over him very secretly; and Senserff fought against it secretly too. And then, when the time had come, it would disappear secretly too. Who ever heard about it at all?

And the doubt came in a curious way. Gently, stealthily, unnoticed, — until suddenly one day Senserff would notice that he was in the midst of it. Neither did he know when it had begun.

"Let me think," he would say; "when and on what occasion did it begin? Yesterday? the day before yesterday? No, it must be longer ago; but I cannot remember! Neither can I remember the cause of it!"

He would think until his brain was tired with thinking, but without avail; there was no reason for his doubting; it had neither father nor mother, and was without a beginning.

"If the doubting from which I suffer does not come from outside, it must have its being in me, and it must be in my blood; so in that case I must be all the more vigilant!"

But his vigilance did not help him much; in a couple of days he would be worse than ever; and then he would be inclined to consider himself incurable.

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There was only one man who at any time was granted a glimpse into his soul; and this was his father-in-law, who came over from Gueldres occasionally.

The friendship between these two men had become even warmer after Helen's death. Neither of them knew which had suffered the more by that loss, but the bond of their love had been strengthened by it.

Sometimes they would start off on a long walk immediately after breakfast, and only return towards dinnertime. They would get some lunch somewhere, far away in the wood, or, still further, beyond the hills, where only

an occasional hut stood on the wide moor. Their love of nature was insatiable.

And sometimes Senserff would start talking. "Yesterday I was telling the small children at my confirmation class about Abram; about that time when he sat before his tent and three angels came to him and he entertained them. God was one of the angels, was he not? And they ate of three measures of fine meal and of a calf, tender and good, and butter and milk. And the children liked the story as I told it. They saw the shepherd's tent and the large oaks towering over it, and the typical Eastern picture of the meal spread out on the ground, in the shade of the oaks, in the heat of the day. But, while I was talking and I was making the story attractive, I assure you I laughed within myself about those men, as Sara did on that occasion. God sitting on the ground eating, and that for several hours; — I will not enlarge upon it to you, I should almost become irreverent. I laughed, I laughed as Sara did! How could that be? How in eternity could that be? When the class was over, I did not believe that incident any more, and I am still of the same opinion, father!"

"A fine confession for a Dissenting minister to make!" Mr. Van Heumen replied. "If we

Reformed ministers were to think in that way now!" And that curious man laughed heartily, as if the incident were of very little importance.

"Do you not consider it very wrong, then, that I think in that way sometimes?"

"Wrong enough, my boy; but not bad enough to become discouraged! Am I not a minister myself? And do I not know what is in the heart of a minister?"

"Well, I suppose you have had your times of doubting too, but it is risky to say such a thing," Senserff said, laughing in his turn.

"But tell me, my boy, did those doubts about the truth of that incident come over you as you were relating it, or was that kind of unbelieving there before?"

"The unbelief came over me as I was talking, but I have had the same feeling about a hundred other Bible stories. God is always walking upon the earth, and He is always talking to the people, sometimes to Abraham, sometimes to Jacob, and then to Moses, and to so many others. It is the same with the Greeks; Zeus is always appearing before his Greeks; only I must admit that the appearances of Zeus are of another character. They are sensual tales; and here, in the Bible, God's appearances are always untainted and

pure and very holy, with child-like innocence."

"Of course, you must doubt many other things besides these appearances, do you not?"

"Oh, yes, when once I get started these doubts extend to almost every other point; everything is so closely united. I very often have moments when everything seems loose, as a building which has been erected, but in which the carpenter has forgotten all the nails; one push and the house will be shattered, a heap of boards on the ground! My belief is very rickety, father!"

And sometimes Senserff would go on talking for half an hour in the same strain, enlarging upon his doubts on all subjects.

The man sometimes did not believe in the deity of Jesus. "Just fancy, try and imagine it! a son of God in the heavens, and then conceived in a virgin — typical Eastern tale, the transubstantiation of God. Just spin it out; and nothing will remain of it!"

Sometimes he did not believe in the deity of the Holy Ghost. "The other day I had preached in another place. It was Whitsuntide, and I was very much annoyed about my sermon; I could make nothing of it: the third person in the Trinity? If there was anyone



unhappy that day, it was I. The next day my friend Rechtman comes driving through the village, gets out and has lunch with me. Still exultant about the beautiful festival which has just been celebrated, he cries: 'How delightful, dear brother, to deal with the Pentecost doctrine before our congregations!' I look at him and remark: 'It is the most difficult doctrine in the Holy Scriptures to explain!' And I am on the point of uttering my opinion. But I change my mind and say: 'There are wicked people nowadays, Rechtman, who do not believe in the Holy Ghost as a person! What do you say to that, old man?' — And the fellow really imagines that I am accusing him of it, and says triumphantly: 'Well, well, I have fortunately from my youth upwards never doubted in the Holy Ghost as a person; it is so delightful never even to have known the cliffs of unbelief!' — After that, I just talked to him about his peas and his carrots, that were already coming up, and about his hens, that were too fat to lay eggs."

Sometimes he did not believe in the reconciliation through Christ. Senserff was very sad when he touched upon this subject; and his tone altered altogether; there was none of his former sarcasm. He spoke about it, as

someone who had sustained a great loss; as one who had lost something and who would like it back, because it was the very best thing he ever possessed. "God could surely forgive at once, father, without letting his Son die first! The father in the parable of the prodigal son did not require the intervention of another son, who sacrificed himself, to forgive the prodigal all. That forgiveness was granted at once."

The two men were standing by a stream. A board was laid across it, but Senserff took a run and jumped across.

"If only you could jump across all your doubts in the same way," Van Heumen said with a laugh, "I suppose that means a spiritual need which you satisfy by bodily exercise?"

"Oh, father, I always jump over the ditches, even when I am visiting the people; and then my elder does not understand why I do it, because there are boards across all of them. These people have no ditches which lie across their roads. And sometimes I climb into a tree, into one of the highest trees which grow here in the wood. The other day I saw Walter walking underneath, busy throwing stones at the squirrels' nests; probably also to satisfy a spiritual need by bodily exercise!"

"That is not unusual. I know a minister who cuts down all his timber himself. His maid thinks it is stinginess that he does not employ a man to do it; but I can assure you that after chopping wood for an hour he feels a different person. And in the same way I quite understand that mania for swimming of another fellow-minister who lived near the sea. Why should he go swimming in the sea, by preference far away, if not to give his thoughts another turn for half an hour, and to bathe in another element than the one he bathed in all day?"

"But," Van Heumen continued, as they walked one behind the other on the narrow path which wound its way across the wide moor, "surely you do not always feel as you have just been telling me about?"

"Oh dear, no! It is only periodical! It passes away! Otherwise of course, I should have to resign! And it goes as it has come; I do not know how. Gradually it passes until I notice one day that I am joyful in the forgiveness of Christ, and I detect myself having triumphant feelings, which are unbounded. It comes and it goes, so that I do not know where it began, nor where it ended."

"Then I will not fight against it either,"

said Van Heumen with a laugh, as one who knows he is taking the wisest course. "It will pass away again, to-day or to-morrow." — "But," he continued, "I am rather curious to know the cause; is it caused by what you read? What do you read? Novels?"

"Novels, piles of them, and all sorts; I have time for it. The greatest readers are found in the country parishes, father. Those in the towns do not require books. They live in the midst of a novel."

"You are wrong there, my boy! Is that why the poets nowadays delight in seeking their subjects in the country? I suppose there is no poetry about your village? And no one will ever write a book about the things in your village? It is high time authors should stop writing pastoral novels! You will see one coming here some day and he will put your village and your personality into a book; how delightful for you to find yourself made into a hero of fiction!"

"But you must not believe, father, that the novels are at the root of it. I cannot understand how a novel can make a person either believing or unbelieving. I read a novel the other day about an English clergyman who talked a great deal with his squire, and heard from

him all the reasons upon which the unauthenticity of the Bible may be founded." — Senserff did not name the book, but Van Heumen knew at once which one he meant. — "What a foolish fellow, to let himself be made unbelieving by arguments! The squire won! And the clergyman very sadly let go his faith!"

"Just like you; you are grieved when you sometimes lose your faith. That is one of the most remarkable sorts of grief which exist." And once more Van Heumen laughed.

"But the most remarkable part of it all is not the book, but this, that I have heard that many men and women who have read the book are just as far on as that clergyman; they have become unbelievers. Just fancy, through a novel!"

"I explain it in this way: their unbelief must have been there before they started reading, and when they read the book they found thoughts in it to which they already adhered. You are quite right; do not let anyone tell you that one person was made an unbeliever by it."

"The wisdom of novels is all second-hand knowledge. How absurd of us to read novels!"

"Why do you read them then?"

"Well, for the art! I have a little artistic feeling, and that feeling sometimes demands



satisfaction. Another person can go to concerts in the great cities; or he can see the plays in the theatre; or he can visit exhibitions and see the best works of our artists and sculptors; or, again, he can go to Corinth; but I, I must find it in a book. My friend Rechtman has much artistic feeling and much artistic taste; and yet he never reads a book!"

"Then, if you want knowledge, you get it from the dry books of the philosophers, so that you are sure of getting it first-hand?"

"Exactly! I wish they would stop writing novels with a purpose! If a philosopher writes a novel, his learning plays him false, and if the poet writes philosophy, his poetical instinct plays him false; it is no good; amphibious cackle in both cases!"

"But I know quite well how your doubting comes about. Those dry books do the deed. Novels make no impression on you, I quite see that. Only a little *nouveau riche* woman from the middle-classes would be influenced by them, affect an important air at her evening parties, saying to her friends: 'Now I have read that novel, I do not believe anything more.' It is learning, pure and simple, which is your enemy; do you not think so too?"

"No, father, it is not that! I have always

been of Kant's opinion, that great German, who wrote: 'Whenever I see an unbeliever has written a book against my faith I think: Oh, I must read that at once, and I shall laugh about it and be amused. And when, on the other hand, a believer writes a thing which might strengthen my faith, I invariably think, in a half-hearted sort of way: I must not read that, I have laughed too much about it already.' Could learning possibly make a man a believer or an unbeliever?"

"I do not know, but, all the same, learning can be a very formidable obstacle to religion. And that same learning may come to a point where it will render religion the best possible service."

"I cannot accept that. What has my intellect got to do with my feelings? If my feelings tell me I love a girl, my intellect may assert what it likes, but my feelings will get the upper hand; that love is deaf, and will remain there even though my intellect may prove that my love should cease."

"But religion is not a case of love? A few people may take it in that way, but their religion is like the love of a sixteen-year old boy, which in later years is replaced by a different kind of love." The old man was only trying

to excite his son-in-law, and was smiling inwardly at his own remarks.

“But, father, if religion is not love, what is it then? It may be the love of a sixteen-year old boy or that of a man of sixty. And look here: — I myself am filled with that love; it is very wonderful and very deep. I do not know when it was born, that love to God; how long have I loved? Can my soul have been born in God’s sphere before that soul was made flesh? Is that why my soul longs for God? I am, in a way, like Joop, — you know him, I have told you about him, the son of Ake, that vagabond, — sometimes he must come back from Rotterdam; he must come here when he feels he can stand it no longer. True, he is always in danger here; the feud follows him, and it will be his death one day, if I know the men of Eastloorn. But he must come back; something drives him. I know he came once after he had been away for four years. He came back to the hut, which you see over there; he came rushing across the moor, and threw himself down on the ground; he buried his hands wildly in the earth; he lay with his face among the heather, he bit the flowers, and he shrieked until his mother came running outside and found him.

I am like Joop father; whenever I have been far from God for some time, then I simply must go back, and I also fall down, in a way which might make people think that I am mad with satisfied longing. And if I am shown a book which has been written against this, my love, then I laugh, and I also laugh when I am shown a book which tries to prove that my love is quite natural. What then has learning to do with religion?"

"I understand; you want to say that a man's religion can only be influenced by learning if it is intellectual and of the mind; but not if according to your conception, it is a religion of love. In that case learning looks on as a stranger, to whom love says: 'I do not know you, you can either stay here, or go away, you are not in my way.' — But, after all this talking, I have not yet found out how your doubts originate."

Both men were silent.

They had reached Ake's dilapidated hut. They saw the tumble-down thatched room, with which the stormwind had played havoc. They saw the planks, which were coming loose, and Senserff bored a hole with his stick through the mouldering wood. They saw the well with the old chain, and beside it,

on the ground, a leaking pail. "Schepers man drank out of it last," Senserff said.

They walked round the hut to the other side. It was all the same as it used to be; a rabbit scuttled off into a sand-hole, and more rabbits followed.

They went inside. Nothing had changed, it was all as it had been — the hearth, with the burned-down cinders; above it the kettle. The bed looked as if someone might have slept in it the night before. The cupboard was still there, with some old clothes and a Bible, and beside it several shrivelled-up sprigs of hawthorn.

They went outside again.

"How is it, boy," Van Heumen said, "that although Joop is driven back here occasionally by a certain longing, he yet always goes away again?"

"I understand. You want to say: How is it that I, who have the same longing for God, can still doubt occasionally? My doubts drive me away from the spot where my longing has brought me."

It was a curious thing how in their conversation the two men so often seemed to change places. The old gentleman liked to ask questions after the manner of Socrates.



"No, do not hurry on, now," he said; "I ask you, how is it that Joop, who is driven back to his moor by a mighty longing, how is it that he always returns after a while to his wicked life in Rotterdam?"

"I think perhaps the attraction of the immoral is too great for him, and then he is forced to go."

"Can your doubts originate in the attraction of the immoral?"

"I do not understand you; at least, I cannot believe that you mean that. Surely all doubters are not immoral people?"

"No, did I say that? Then I must express myself better. Of course all those who doubt are not immoral people. I should be the first to contradict such a statement. But — let me put it in this way: when is it that your faith in the redemption by Christ is greatest? It goes without saying that your faith in that redemption is stronger at one time than it is at another. When is it strongest?"

"It is strongest when I feel the need of it most. There are times when my need seems very small, and there are times when it is very great. And my faith in the atonement varies according to my need of it."

"Exactly. And when is your need greatest?"

"It is greatest when I am most oppressed with the knowledge of my own sins!"

"Exactly! And when are you most oppressed with the knowledge of your own sins?"

"That is when the good in me, the sense of morality is aroused. When that sense of morality is asleep I am quite at peace with myself. But when it is awakened it cries out for the wiping out of those sins and the reconciliation with God, and it cries out for Christ, for it cannot exist without Him."

"Well then, the cause of your doubting is quite clear. Let me repeat my question: Can your doubting have its origin in the attraction of the immoral?"

"My dear father, I do not understand."

"I see I shall have to explain exactly what I mean by immoral. The word immoral means not only what most people understand by it; what I consider immoral is the immorality of believers who consider themselves very good. And it is impossible that faith can hold its own when this feeling exists!"

The young man was silent for a long time.

They had come to a part of the moor where there was a curious vegetation.

Here the tall holly bushes grew instead of the short heather; the prickly dark green

leaves wounded their hands if they were not very careful. The holly bushes grew in groups, as if they had been planted by men's hands, and a narrow path wound its way among them. It was not possible to see across the moor, and the two men had to peep through the bushes to catch sight of it. The branches were covered with last year's berries, and the red colour looked beautiful against the dark green leaves.

When they had passed the holly bushes, they came to a large field of juniper shrubs, a mass of soft pale blue colour, tinged with the deep purple of the berries. As the two men reached the top of the hill, they stood gazing across the wide juniper field, which extended for about a mile. The shrubs had the appearance of curiously shaped rocks fallen down on the pure white sand, and it almost gave them the impression of being in a desert.

"A large patch of juniper shrubs is a rare thing in our country," the older man remarked; "I only know one other, it is near Ruurlo, a long way from the village."

"But think about it," he continued in the same breath; "I am really repeating the same thing, although I may express it in a different way. Those doubts about Christ's redemption

generally spring up when, according to our own ideas, we have lived a very good and moral life for a week or a fortnight. That feeling of our own goodness takes away the need of reconciliation, and that in its turn does away with faith, and then suddenly one day, without any apparent reason, not caused by the reading of a novel or a learned book, we notice that our doubts are there once more, and then we say: 'My doubting has neither father nor mother and is without an origin.' Think it over, my boy!"

Not many days later something occurred which made Senserff think very deeply about this subject, and which cured him of his doubts for a considerable time.

Joop had once more appeared in the village.

He had been driven back and he had returned, leaving the distant city far behind him. He had not said to his master: "I am going away;" he had not said to his friends in the public-house: "I am going away." But it had come over him suddenly. And it happened in this way.

One morning he had left his lodgings at five o'clock to go to his work in the docks. And as he was walking across the "Wijnhaven"

on his way to the docks, he noticed a woman in one of the boats, a woman who was busy putting turf into a stove, in order to boil some water. The smoke of the peat came out of the little chimney and was blown across the harbour towards the houses. Joop breathed in the smoke, and — suddenly he stood still.

“That peat comes from Eastloorn,” he said, and he could not walk on.

In his imagination he saw Eastloorn, the little path which led from the moor to the village. When he went towards the village from his mother’s hut, and reached the first houses, he remembered smelling the smoke of peat which came from the chimneys. The picture was complete.

He leant against the railing of the “Wijnbrug” and breathed deeply, and gazed ahead. But he did not see those boats lying in front of him in the early morning.

“Drunk already? Hold on to the railing!” a workman who came by shouted, but he did not hear.

He saw his village; the tower, where old Iltíng would ring the bell at six o’clock; the trees round it, almost reaching to the roof of the church; the bridge with Heister the bridge-man leaning across the railing, always



gazing into the water; the farms with the flowering apple-trees, pink and white; the river which flowed across the fields, the cows grazing on the dyke on either side; the pinewoods, the coppice, the moor, his mother's hut.....

The devil of homesickness had seized hold of him!

He had a little money, which he always carried about with him. And suddenly he rushed along the "Wijnhaven" to the "Maas" station; home! home!

For one moment in the train, the thought crept over him: "There in Eastloorn big Garst is waiting for me, the brother of golden-haired Reeze, who will make me pay for what I did to his sister!" It was only for a moment though; the Beelzebub of homesickness drove away the Beelzebub of fear.

And so Joop returned to Eastloorn.

The villagers said: "How dare he come back, the vagabond?"

And those who knew even more about it said: "How dare he? Now surely big Garst will revenge his sister!"

Joop lay sleeping in his mother's hut, in the bed which the old woman used to let him have when he came home, while she herself spent the night lying on the floor.

And when he awoke, he fixed his eyes on the window. The window was almost fallen to pieces and could not be closed; so he had left it, as it made no difference to him. Joop had not slept any the worse on that account.

He lay there, his eyes wide open, wondering what he should do. It was still very early; he wondered if the sun had risen yet. Should he dig out some rabbits? Or should he lie in wait for the sleeping ducks in the marsh?

All at once he saw a man appear at the window.

Joop's hair stood on end.

The man was Garst. "Come outside, Joop!" he commanded, as he opened the window still wider.

And the vagabond heard the man who sought his life go round the house by the window to the door, and he knew that he was resting his tall and heavy body against the door-post, waiting patiently as if he were in no hurry to commit his murder, yet very careful lest his prey might slip out of his grasp.

Joop jumped out of the bed, in which he had lain fully dressed, with his boots on. He felt in his pocket for his knife, — it was there.

He stood by the door, the rickety door. "Good heavens!" he thought; "if Garst wants

to, he can push in that door with one finger, and then the fight from which one of us will never rise again can begin!" The vagabond feared the worst.

"What do you want, Garst?" he said, shouting as someone does who wants to show his courage in his voice.

"Come outside, I say! Do you think I want to murder you in your mother's house? Could I not have jumped in by the window in that case?" It was the calm voice of a man who has made up his mind irrevocably.

For one moment Joop wavered and wondered whether he should take the risk. He knew that he was strong, and surely he could win. Why not? But suddenly he remembered the buckwheat field where once he had killed a man. He saw again Ruurd's dead body, and the blood on the white flowers of the buckwheat.

"Go away, Garst!" he cried; "I do not want a second man on my conscience. There, now you know who killed the bell-ringer's son; do you want to be a dead man, too?"

A harsh laugh was his only answer.

And without a word, Joop jumped out of the window, and ran across the wide moor, which extended right into Germany.

"Damn!" was all the giant said when

he saw that the fugitive was about ten feet ahead of him.

And then the wild chase began, the chase of a man to whom life still seemed valuable, being the greatest gift which the world could offer him.

The two ran, each holding a glittering knife in his hand, — the one pursuing, and quite prepared to inflict a wound with that knife, and the other pursued, but also quite ready, if necessary, to turn round suddenly and to run the knife into the giant's body. The steel glittered in the rays of the rising sun.

Joop ran for all he was worth; the uneven country did not hinder him; he could have kicked the hares on his way, hares which were surprised before they had time to fly.

He had covered a great distance in a few moments without looking round, — when he did, the giant was close behind. Neither of the two had gained an inch.

They went on and on, and half an hour elapsed. Joop looked round again — the giant was not running as fast as he was; — and he shouted, a shout of victory. He began to hope that the fight might be avoided.

They came to the holly bushes; they rushed through them, while the branches scratched

their faces; the sharp, prickly leaves wounded their faces and hands so that drops of blood flowed out of little wounds, but they dried up as they ran.

They came to the field of juniper shrubs, and rushed madly through the soft white sand. Their feet sank deep into it; they began to slow down. If only he could hide here. But the giant was taller than the shrubs and could follow all his movements. On — On!

He did not know where to turn; when he reached the end of the juniper field he could not go across the border. The custom-house officials would see him; they had rifles and would surely shoot him if he did not stop at their bidding. They were always on the lookout for smugglers at all times. And one word from Garst about the murder which he had confessed would be enough to.....

No, he must go back, he must run towards the marsh, where Schepers' sheep were grazing; there was no one there but Soer, the shepherd boy. And he turned to the right with a wide curve, and ran in the direction of the marsh.

Garst was a long way behind. Joop began to get tired. He would go slower, and recover a little. He did it, and then he heard his own panting, which he had not noticed before. He



felt his blood beating in his temples, and he wiped the foam from his mouth. Oh, for a drink of water!

When he looked round, he saw that Garst was going slower too. He shouted again, a cry of victory. But he dared not go slowly for long, and the wild chase began again.

They came to the marsh. "He does not know the way here as I do," the fugitive thought; "he will stick in the mud, which looks like grass."

But Garst knew the way there too. And he was winning, — he seemed to be catching up; Joop's body was a dissipated one; he was strong and quick for a time, but his strength soon gave out. The giant was fast catching up. They jumped across ditches; they waded through parts of the marsh which Joop knew to be shallow; the water splashed up high and they drank with bent heads. But the giant was winning. "That pool over there is deep," Joop thought; "the water reaches to my neck; it may be my salvation; he will not risk it." And he charged into it. But the giant jumped in too; his height made it easier for him to get on. They drank as they went. When they had reached the other side he was quite close to Joop. The scamp yelled, pulled himself

together, rushed on; and the wild chase began again, once more towards the open moor, to where the holly bushes grew.

Soer, the shepherd boy, stood on a hill holding his long staff and knitting a stocking, his dog beside him. "Hist! Sipie, be quiet! if only they had your legs!" And the boy looked across the moor calmly, as if it did not concern him that those two people were rushing madly along, each with a large glittering knife in his hand. "The big one is winning, Sipie!" he said, and sat down on the hill, regretting that he could not see them any more, for they had disappeared in the holly bushes, the one shortly after the other.

"Leave me alone, Garst!" Joop shrieked, without looking round. He knew that the other one was close behind, only a couple of feet away. "Leave me alone, Garst!" he yelled, again. He was only a foot behind him now. —

He wanted to turn round, and use his knife, he wanted to live, to live, not to die.....

But the giant's hand was already coming down on him, and it thrust the glittering knife right down his neck, between his shoulders into his flesh.....

Joop fell forward with his face in the prickly leaves of the holly, a groan and then.....

Garst turned round and went his way calmly, as if the affair had no more interest for him. Then he stopped to consider for one moment, looking down at the ground, and went towards the German border. He never came back to his parents.

There was always a prodigal son in East-loorn; now Garst was the prodigal son. There had always been one in each new generation, as long as the oldest inhabitants of the village could remember. It was a fate over the village.

When the people heard about Garst, a great sadness came over them; it was on account of that fate from which they could not escape. They went to church quietly and silently, with bowed heads. They were ashamed, as if each one had committed a murder himself.

That sense of depression lasted for many weeks.

The shepherd boy had not remained lying on the knoll after he had heard Joop's loud yell coming from the holly bushes. "He has got him, Sipië!" he said, and master and dog jumped up. "Now the big one is going away alone, and the other one is still there. He must be dead; shall we go and look, Sipië?"

And as the holly bushes were only at a little distance, the boy risked leaving his sheep alone.

The dog bounded on in front, the boy came a little slower; — soon they found Joop lying on the ground, his face buried in the prickly leaves of the holly; there was blood on the dark green leaves.

“We must turn him round,” the boy said, “and see who he is!” And he took hold of the wounded man’s shoulders, very carefully, so as not to stain his hands with the blood; for he was terrified by the sight of human blood. He shivered as he did it, but he began to work with might and main, and at last succeeded. He could see the face; the head fell back, the mouth wide open. The boy was startled, cried out and let the body fall back into the holly. As if he had seen death itself, he hurried back to his sheep quite out of breath.

But by degrees he collected his thoughts. “Sipiel!” he said, “look after the sheep. I am going away; I must go and make it known in the village; you must stay here. Do you understand?”

And the dog understood. He turned his sensible head to the grazing flock of sheep;

and as the boy hurried away, the dog remained lying on the knoll, looking from right to left, as if he had undertaken his master's task with complete self-confidence.

Some hours later the wounded man had been carried into Ake's hut. He was still alive. The doctor was there, and he stayed there all afternoon. "He may live another day, but he will not recover," was his verdict. The mayor also had come with the village constable. He was told to return in the evening. "Perhaps he will tell you something," the doctor had said. And when the night fell, there were three men keeping watch over the dying man; Senserff, Schepers, and the village constable.

It was dark in the hut; there was no lamp and no candle. Sometimes the men sat inside, sometimes they stood outside in the moonlight.

Senserff paced backwards and forwards constantly, as if he were trying to avoid the other men; he preferred to be alone, either inside or outside. He was very restless, for he felt that a difficult task would be laid upon him when that dying man should speak later on, a task such as can only be laid on the shepherd who shall be called upon by the Great Judge to account for even the least of his flock. He was still under the impression



of the conversation with his father-in-law; his doubts had not yet passed away; he was not quite himself. And, good heavens! it was in this mood that he was called upon to comfort a dying man. He cursed his doubts, although he could not possibly drive them away at his own will.

This is how the minister accomplished his task:

After midnight, towards the break of day, while he was alone with him, Joop recovered consciousness. Senserff had left him for an hour or more. He had done nothing at all; he had only given him a drink of water every now and then.

"I must die, sir, must I not?" the man said at last in a soft voice.

"Yes, Joop, you cannot be cured," Senserff said, for he belonged to those people who consider it a terrible breach of faith towards a dying man to leave him in ignorance of his condition. He always told the members of his congregation candidly when he knew there was no hope.

"Say something to me, sir!"

"Oh God, surely I cannot be a hypocrite and tell this man things that I do not believe at the present moment," he almost gasped.

He despised himself for trying to evade the dying man's request by a question; but he could not help it. "What would you like to hear about, Joop?"

"About Jesus."

The minister understood that at this moment old feelings which had long slumbered were roused in the man. "Would you like me to tell you what your old minister told you at your confirmation class, when you were a little boy?"

"Yes; I wish I were a little boy again."

And the minister began, — there was no hypocrisy about this, fortunately, — he was only telling a story. He began in an almost monotonous tone of voice, as good story-tellers should always do. But, as he went on, his voice grew warmer, but not louder. No one could tell a story better than Senserff did. It seemed to the wounded man as if he were once more a little boy, listening to his minister in the old room behind the church. The scenes at Jesus' death on the cross, — he saw them all; Senserff described them all in detail, as a good story-teller should do, one scene after another. Quietly and melodiously the old story sounded in the still night. And when he had finished there was almost no transition

between the last word and the silence that followed.

"Do you want to hear any more, Joop?"

"No, sir, it is enough now."

"No, not enough," Senserff said, almost too loudly, remembering his ministership. It was very poetic to let anyone die while under the impression of a story, and such a story, too; but his dogmatic character would not allow him to do that. "Joop, I must know whether you believe that now?" Senserff was almost startled when he had put the question; for did he really believe it himself? But Joop was quite ready with his answer.

"I have always believed it. When I swore worst of all, among the dock-workers, I always believed it. Only I swore in spite of it."

"What is the difference then, Joop, between then and now?" the minister said with fear in his voice.

"The difference is that now I do not want to swear in spite of it, — now I believe for the first time as a grateful man. It is a good thing for a man such as I am that Jesus obtained forgiveness for us... At least, if..."

Here the man sighed, deeply and long.

"Are you in pain?"

"No, no, it is not that, that does not count.

Give me your hand upon it, sir, that Jesus did it for me." He put out a big, rough hand to the minister.

Senserff hesitated; the doctrine of the elect.....

"Where is your hand? I cannot see," the man groaned.

With an effort, which he never regretted afterwards, the charitable man, more than the dogmatic man, put out his hand and grasped the hand of the vagabond who wanted to believe.

Later on, it was a dead hand which he held in his own.

In the morning Senserff went home. He did not want Schepers to accompany him. How could he talk to an elder of the Dissenting Church? If only he had done it! The elder would not have contradicted him. Even Niesink, the bee-farmer, would not have thought or acted differently that morning.

"When the feeling of sinfulness was aroused in Joop, then need for reconciliation arose; and where that need was, there faith came naturally;" he argued with himself. "Can my father-in-law be right when he says that doubting has its origin in the attraction of the

immoral? Then, in my case, the doubting originated after living for weeks convinced of my own righteousness, so that I did not feel the need of redemption."

He saw Walter coming towards him. He told him all. "Do you at all times believe in the redemption?" he asked.

"I believe most when I feel most sinful; at other times I believe it less. Self-righteousness is the greatest enemy of faith; the doubt of believers can hardly originate in anything else."

Here they had come to the parting of their roads.

Senserff felt deeply dismayed. The minister of the Reformed Church, who went his way so cheerfully, had understood it all long ago. "He is not as cheerful as he seems," Senserff thought; "he pretends to be for the sake of the sorrowful ones. I see it all; he has long since known the enemy of his faith; the immorality of self-righteousness. He secretly weeps about his sins, and that is why his faith is greater than mine."

"Self-righteousness is the greatest enemy of faith, the doubting of believers can hardly originate in anything else;" Senserff repeated, as he entered his house.

After that day the minister of the Dissenting



Church was cured of his doubts for a considerable time

And his parish gained by it beyond measure.

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"How many ministers have you Reformed members got?" Wiegen asked Raders one evening, as the men stood talking on the Square.

"One, of course," the latter answered, "Walter!"

"And how many ministers have you Dissenters got?" he enquired of Schepers.

"Also one, of course," he answered, "Senserff!"

"Then my parish is better of than yours," Wiegen said laughingly; "we have them both, Senserff and Walter."

"We have also all the elders," he added, "for all your elders and deacons belong to my Church. And, besides that, a good many members of both congregations belong to my Church."

And, as he said this, he smiled, as someone does who sees the Kingdom of Heaven coming.

"What a dreamer!" Raders and Schepers both thought.

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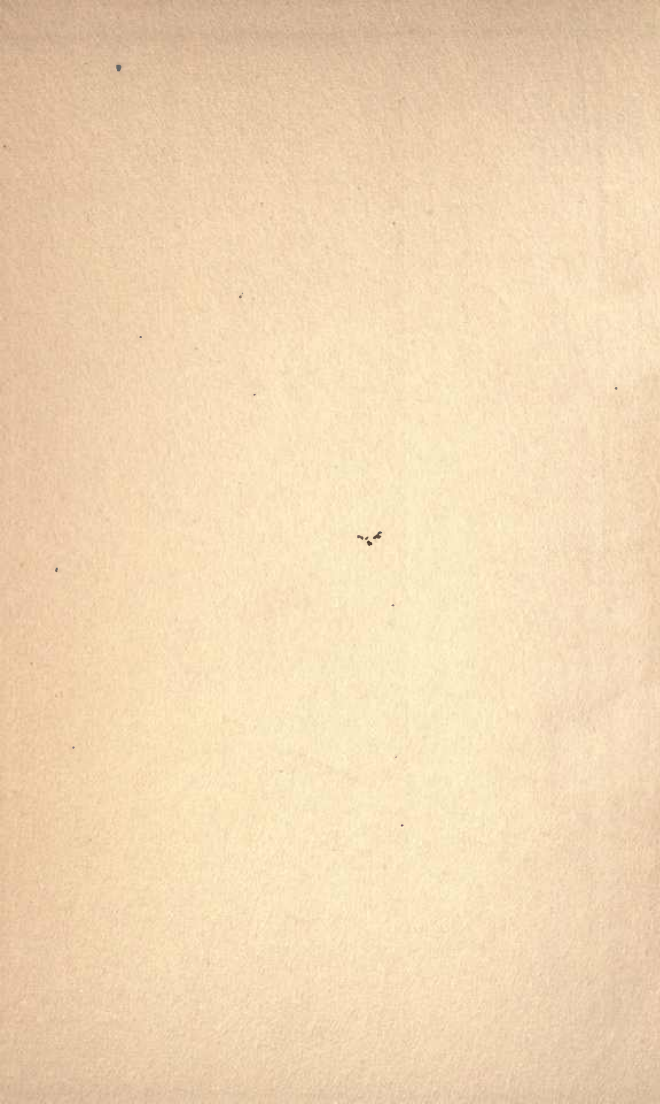












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